

**NHF Smaller Associations National Group  
Survey of smaller housing associations 2013**

December 2013



HouseMark   
Performance Improvement

NATIONAL  
HOUSING  
FEDERATION  
federation  
subscriber



## Contents

1	Introduction .....	2
2	The National Group .....	3
2.1	Areas of focus .....	3
3	Collaboration and partnership working.....	5
3.1	Partnership working.....	6
3.2	Main local partners .....	7
4	Performance improvement .....	8
4.1	Benchmarking.....	8
4.2	Collective commissioning of services.....	9
5	Development.....	10
6	Further comments on the role of the Group.....	11



## 1 Introduction

This report provides the findings of a survey carried out by Skills & Projects on behalf of the National Housing Federation Smaller Associations National Group in November 2013.

The purpose of the survey was get feedback from smaller associations to help the Group to understand how best it can support and co-ordinate their activities.

The survey was targeted at Board members and Chief Executives from smaller housing associations. All responses to the survey were anonymous.

The survey was launched to co-incide with the NHF smaller housing associations conference with hard-copies of the survey being distributed at the conference and advice on on-line completion subsequently sent to NHF contacts, Skills & Projects benchmarking subscribers and contacts, and members of the Group's own regional networks.

Skills & Projects delivered the survey for free as part of our commitment to supporting the National Housing Federation Smaller Associations National Group, which includes a commercial interest in growing SPBM – our benchmarking and performance comparison service for smaller housing providers.

In this report, we present the survey findings for discussion (i.e. without interpretation or commentary).

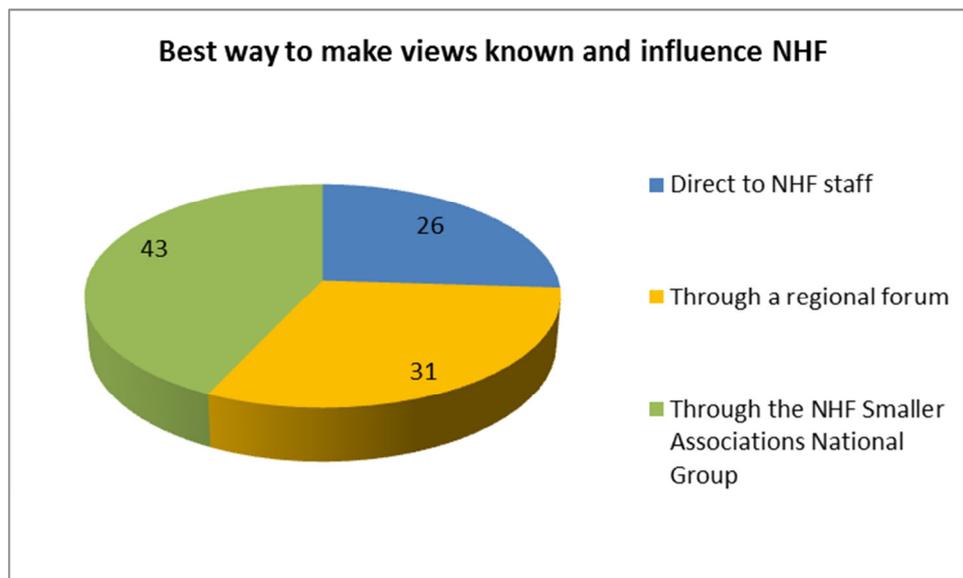
There were 91 responses to the survey.



## 2 The National Group

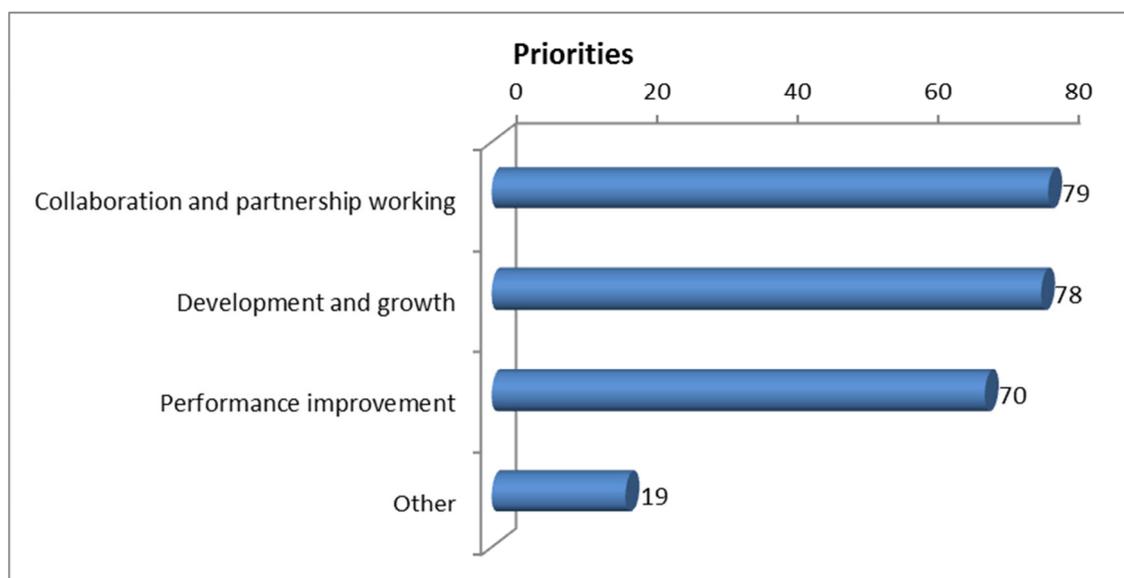
**74%** of respondents were aware that there is a NHF Smaller Associations National Group. (26% were not aware).

**43%** feel that the best way to make their views known and influence the NHF's campaigning work is through the NHF Smaller Associations National Group. 31% think the best way is through a regional forum and 26% by going direct to NHF staff.



### 2.1 Areas of focus

Respondents were asked to consider the three areas of focus which the Group have identified as priorities. Respondents indicated whether or not they agree that each is a priority. They were invited to tick as many options as were applicable and the figures below show the percentages of respondents who selected each option.





17 respondents (19%) selected the option 'Other' and made the following remarks:

- Improve our profile with the NHF
- Social Value
- Cost sharing
- Lobbying re Diversity of Providers
- Efficiency and VFM
- Benchmarking
- Promotion of value of locally based, locally focussed organisations
- Joint procurement
- Promoting the importance of small housing associations
- The HCA's 'hang up' that the best way forward is through mergers and group structures
- Sustainability
- VFM
- Funding from government to be available to all housing groups, not just the big
- It is important the impact of changes in the social fabric are also considered
- Welfare reform – impact
- Might be a part of collaboration - employment and skills for tenants
- Getting the HCA / GLA to ring-fence some allocations to smaller HAs



### 3 Collaboration and partnership working

**91%** of respondents think the performance of their organisation would be improved through greater collaborative working with other housing associations.

These respondents indicated who they would like to collaborate with, selecting as many options as were applicable. The figures below show the percentages of respondents who selected each option.

Who would you like to collaborate with?	%
Anyone as long as it helps us to learn and improve what we do	64
Similar sized housing associations	51
Larger housing associations	7
Other	7

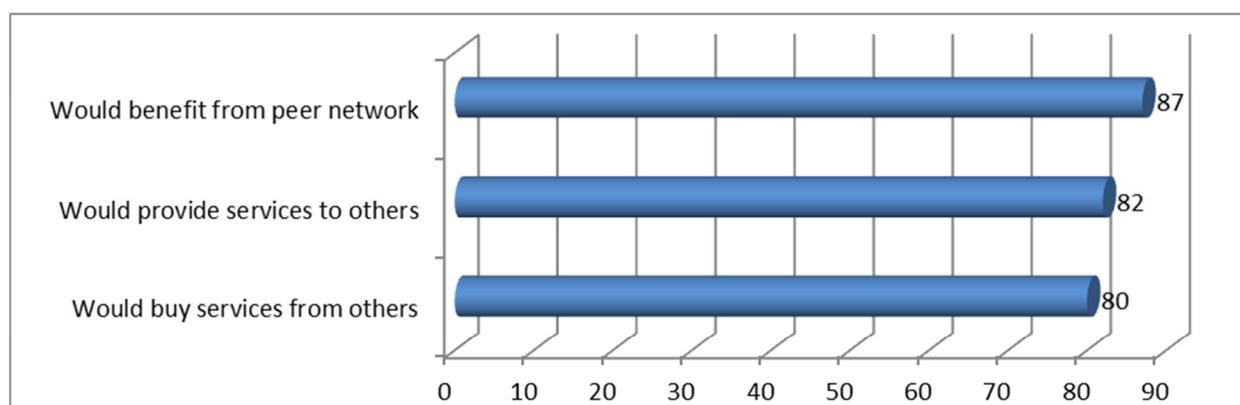
6 respondents selected the option 'Other' and made the following remarks:

- G320
- Those who share the same values
- SPBM members
- Those that have a similar national spread and are primarily support providers
- Need to consider learning from the private sector
- Housing associations with same ethos

**80%** of respondents indicated that their association would consider buying services from another housing association.

**82%** of respondents indicated that their association would consider providing services on behalf of another housing association.

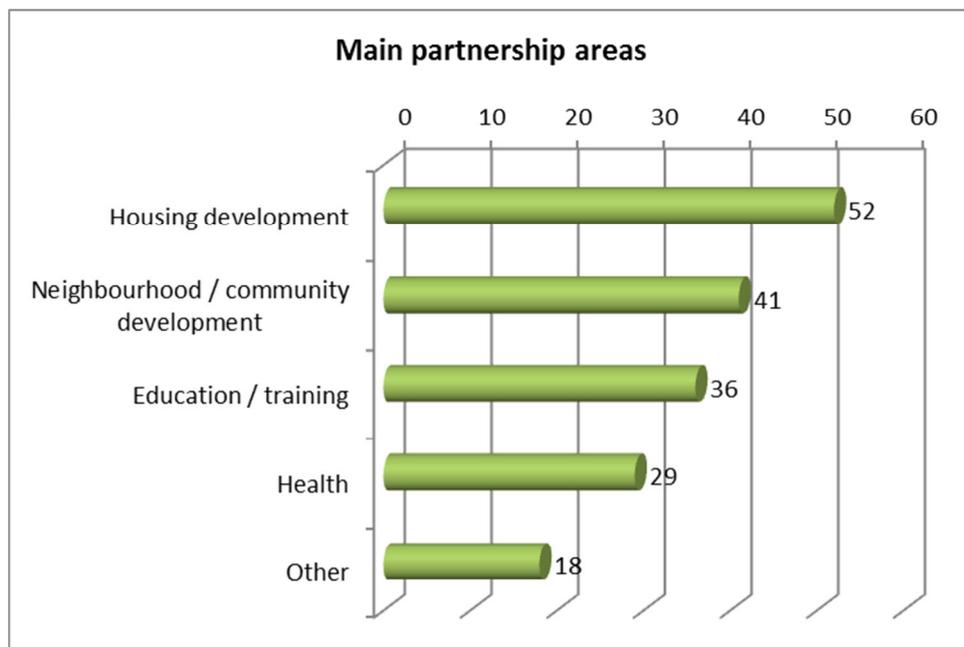
**87%** said that their organisation would benefit from a peer support network.





### 3.1 Partnership working

66 respondents (**73%**) indicated that their organisation is engaged in partnership working in the following areas. Respondents selected as many options as were applicable and the figures below show the percentages of respondents who selected each option.



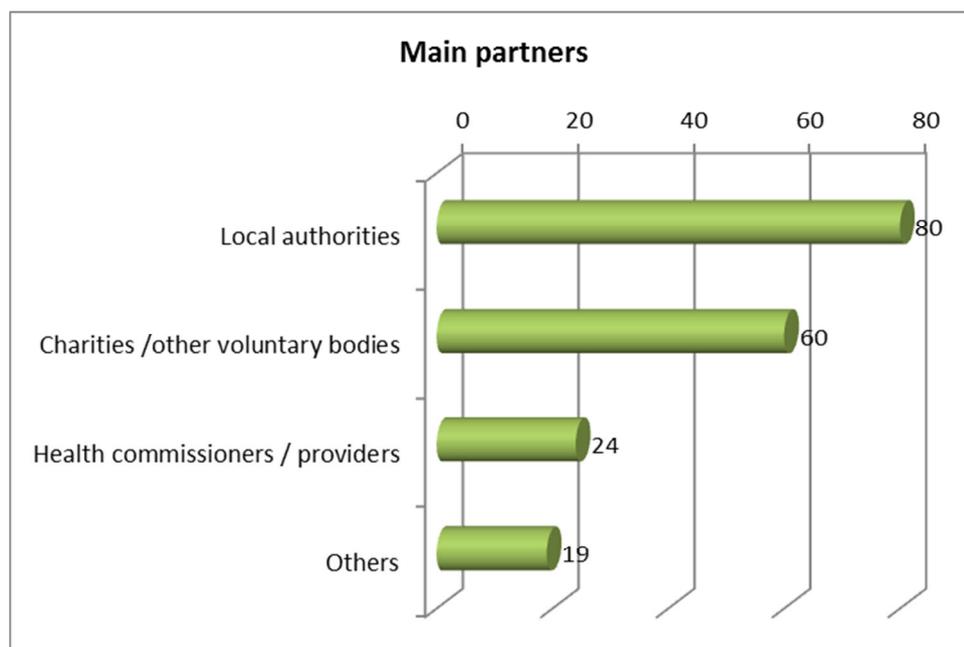
12 respondents selected the option 'Other' and made the following remarks:

- Sustainability consultancy
- Social services personal budgets
- Support Services
- Care and support
- Lots of ways
- Services for Older People; housing options for people with Learning Disabilities
- Peer Reviews of Services
- Repairs and maintenance
- Resident scrutiny
- Housing management and maintenance
- Housing management
- Provision of services to vulnerable adults



### 3.2 Main local partners

Respondents indicated who they see as their main local partners, selecting as many options as were applicable. The figures below show the percentages of respondents who selected each option.



14 respondents selected the option 'Other' with 6 indicating that they partner with other housing providers. The rest made the following remarks:

- We have no main local partners
- Development consortia that we belong to
- Tenants
- Support providers
- Parish councils; community land trusts
- Support Providers and other RP's
- Church, school
- Specialist providers like ourselves

29 respondents (32%) indicated that they would you be willing to showcase any partnership working / successes at events or in publications by the NHF / Smaller Associations National Group.

Two respondents specified what they would be willing to showcase:

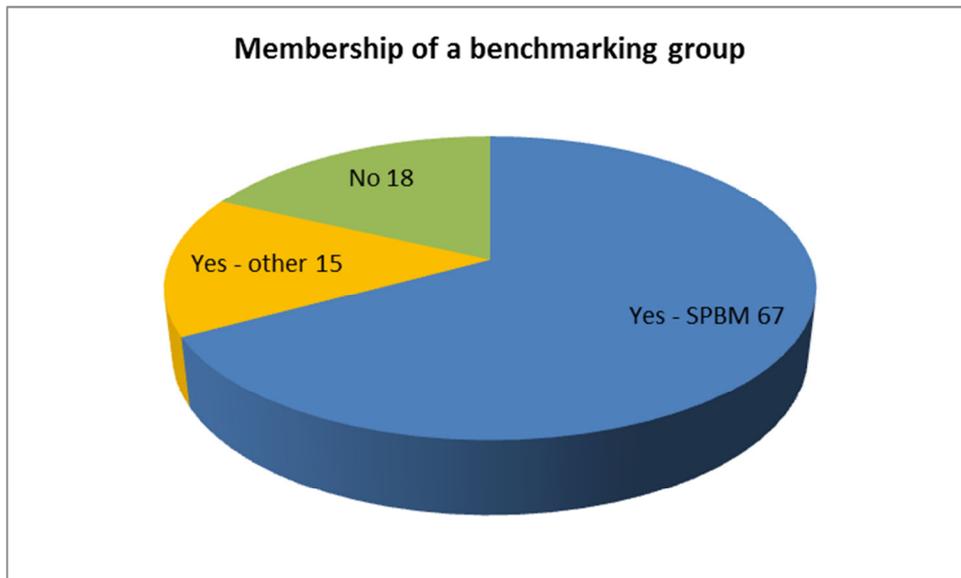
- Barnsbury HA - community safety
- Rosemary Simmons Memorial HA – membership of a development consortium



## 4 Performance improvement

### 4.1 Benchmarking

**82%** of respondents indicated that their organisation belongs to a benchmarking club with 67% belonging to SPBM and 15% to another group.

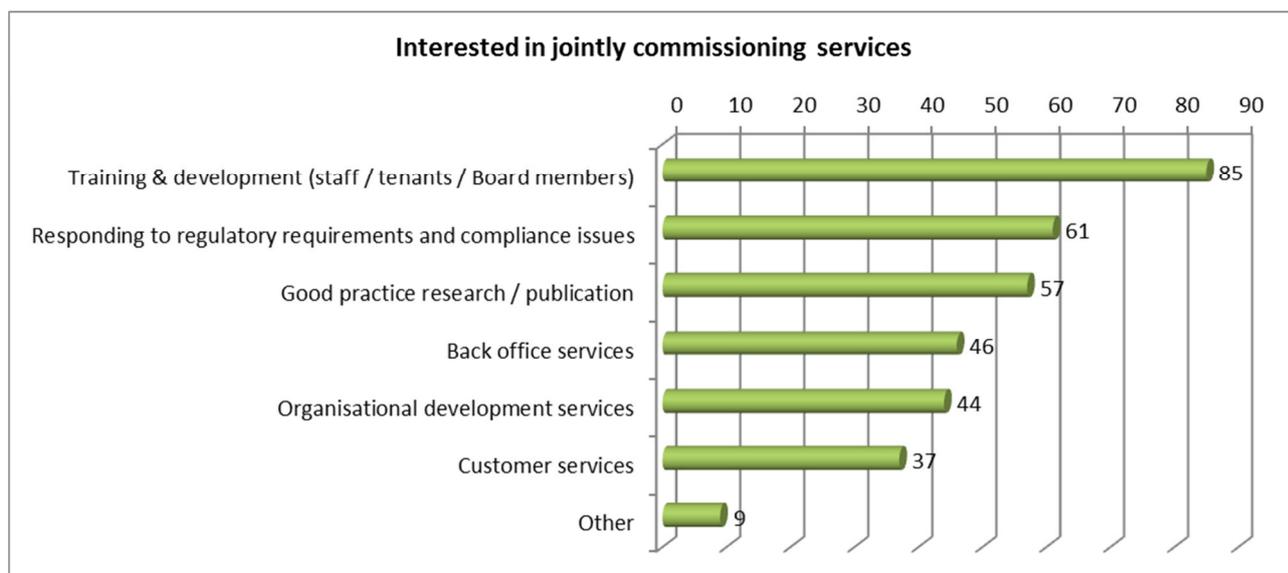


Of the 18% (16 organisations) who do not belong to a benchmarking group, 7 said they would consider it, 5 were not sure and 2 said they would not consider it.



## 4.2 Collective commissioning of services

79 respondents (87%) indicated that they are interested in working with other smaller HAs to collectively commission one or more of the following additional services. Respondents selected as many options as were applicable. The figures below show the percentages of respondents interested in each area.



7 respondents selected the option 'Other' and made the following remarks:

- Market research
- Development Agency / Funding Bids
- HR is always a problem for smaller organisations
- Secondments and mentoring
- Exploring Cost sharing groups
- Development expertise
- Possibly

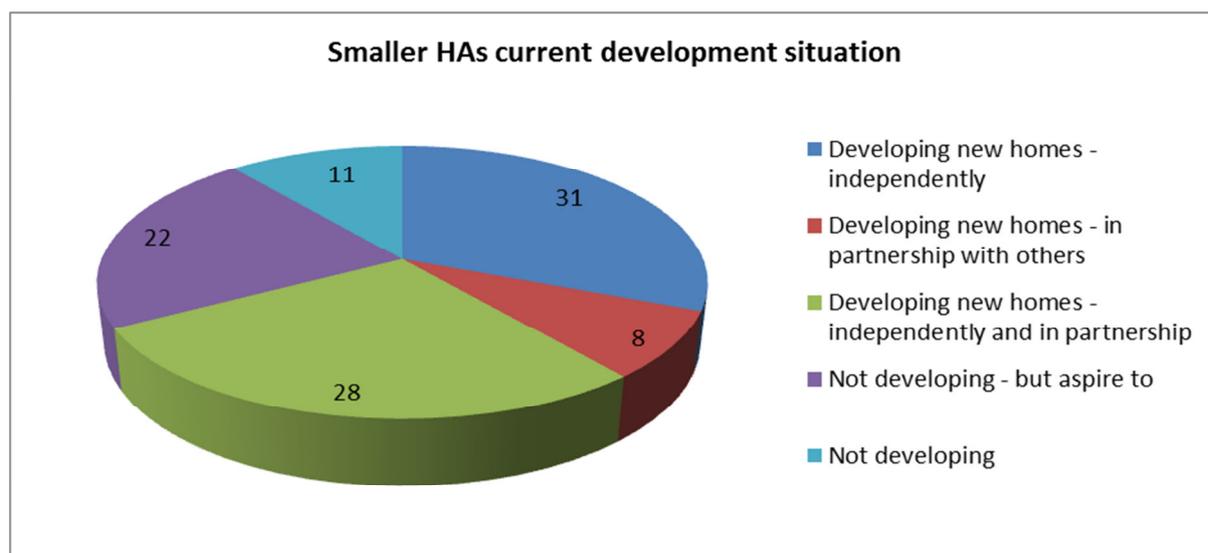


## 5 Development

**84%** of respondents indicated they see growth in the number of new homes (owned and / or managed) as part of its mission. 11% said they were not sure and 6% said 'no'.

**48%** of respondents see involvement in the development of new homes as critical to their organisation's future success. 52% do not see it as critical.

Respondents identified which of the categories below best describes their current situation.



Three of the 40 organisations (8%) who see development as critical are currently not developing. 16 of the 71 (23%) who see growth as part of their mission are not developing.

Respondents indicated how the National Group can best help their organisation.



3 respondents selected the option 'Other' and made the following remarks:

- Lobbying for larger RSLs to transfer stock to smaller RSLs
- Already well equipped but could offer advice
- I don't really think the Group has a role in this



## 6 Further comments on the role of the Group

I should like to see the Group impose much greater influence over those who dictate the work of the NHF. The voice of the smaller association is not nearly loud enough, because it is not effective enough.

The group should actively promote the contribution & successes of small RPs. It should have a higher profile. Outputs from the group should be more widely publicised.

NHF needs to define 'Small' - as much of the advice/documentation refers to Small HAs which own and manage several thousand properties. Recommend the definition refers to HAs who own less than 1000 properties

Unfortunately the small rsl group regionally (east) has not met for some time so I think we have limited input at the moment. I am not even sure who the rep is these days. (I have been the rep in the past). I don't think the HCA understands us. They seem to think we are sitting on loads of assets and don't want to develop whereas in my experience we do want to develop but get very little support from the HCA to do this.

I have been CEO of a smaller association for 2 years and know very little about the work of this group, who is on the committee or what its aims and objectives are. It isn't always clear how my region links in with the National Group as local meetings have been inconsistent.

We are members of g320 and value that.

The NHF SANG provides a useful information sharing and support platform for smalls, however more could be done to help/support smalls to lever funding opportunities to develop/acquire new homes through options available, including identifying stock rationalisation opportunities to allow those who are seeking growth, an opportunity to grow.

Is the NHF still supporting this Group? If not, should it not drop the NHF from its name? It is disappointing that the NHF seems to have decided that it will disengage from a wide section of its membership, presumably in response to the larger and some London-based organisations who seemingly no longer value the voluntary and community-based ethos and see themselves as part of the private sector (even though their financial strength has been built on the back of public subsidy). The principles of voluntary service and a community-based focus are still important to large proportion of the NHF's membership. The Group therefore has role to play in promoting the value of locally based organisations, perhaps in partnership with other bodies such as NCVO. There is a significant amount of collaborative work happening between smaller community-based groups and perhaps this Group has a role in coordinating and promoting that mutual support.

Take on board fully the cultural differences between large - generally functionally segmented



and better supported - RPs and smaller, where management areas are necessarily shared and/or less clearly segmented. Also, that setting aside creative time - whether for thinking, creating, meeting - is often very difficult to do given other unnegotiable deadlines, both internal and external. It's not just about bigger outfits thinking smaller: it's about an entirely different way of working - neither better nor worse, just inevitably VERY different.

I think wed need to do more to demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of smaller HAs and challenge the HCA's view that 'bigger' is best through hard evidence

I believe it a good idea to keep to a tight but focussed agenda for the next couple of years. Ideally I would hope we would be capable of self challenge.

[re Q8 Peer Support] We are in a group already (SHAPE) which is very useful.

Most of the NHF's members are sub 1000 units yet the interests of these providers and the interests of sub 5000 members are overshadowed by those of the 70 or so very large members. There is no evidence to suggest that larger HAs are more efficient.

Wednesday's conference was one of the best and most relevant I have attended.

The profile of the Group needs to be raised, I know little about what this group does

It needs to get government to focus on the good things smaller housing groups, like co-ops, produce and make work, the in house training, making residents feel good about their homes / locality. The self-confidence which comes with being part of a co-op which over spills into the job market, companies appreciate staff who give their time voluntarily as shows they care. I have pondered on how the larger housing groups get bigger, yet seem to over stretch themselves, and end up in trouble.

Being new to this I have been impressed with the information that is available and how easy it is to get hold of.

No - keep up the good work!

To raise the profile of small associations

I think it is really important that there is a smaller HA's National group that can voice opinions and present the views of smaller HA's with a chance of being heard - especially if there is a remit from smaller HA's generally which will give added weight.

I used to get minutes of the meetings and don't seem to have had them since July 2011. I find the G320, BM320 and another smaller peer group provides more opportunity for collaboration than I have time for. In fact I find it difficult to work as much with those groups as I wish to. To add another layer through the National Group would not be productive for me.



## About Skills & Projects

Skills & Projects provide consultancy, resident satisfaction (STAR) survey and benchmarking services, helping housing providers to improve services and engage with their residents and staff.

We focus on performance improvement: positive outcomes for providers and residents, not just box-ticking. Our services are highly flexible, always carefully tailored to the requirements and budgets of our customers.

Skills & Projects have been providing consultancy services to the social housing sector for 15 years. We work in partnership with HouseMark to support the benchmarking activities of smaller and specialist housing providers.

