



PRESS  
INFORMATION

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## **Property managers put consumers first at major leasehold conference**

**This year's annual conference of leasehold property managers, organised by the Association Residential Managing Agents (ARMA), has focused even more closely on making life better for people living in blocks of flats. A ground-breaking initiative to further raise standards in the property management sector and fill the void left by government's failure to regulate, was announced to over 500 managing agent delegates.**

Baroness Dianne Hayter of Kentish Town, well-known consumer champion and expert in property matters, was asked by ARMA to carry out an independent review and recommend changes in its self regulatory processes. Reporting on the findings at the conference she said: "From the start of our review it quickly became clear that much had already been achieved in establishing block management as a knowledge-based and expert industry, and in raising standards amongst members. It was also clear from our numerous consultations with external parties that ARMA's reputation was high.

"The aim of the Review was to make recommendations to ARMA as to how it could establish an enhanced regulatory regime to improve the quality of block management agencies and thereby improve the experience of people who live in flats or apartments.

"We increasingly recognised that this amounted to moving the industry to be more akin to a profession, driven by high standards and by an acknowledgement of interests which go beyond the direct client.

"We have recommended that ARMA separate regulation and representation with the

regulatory role involving independent consumer representatives. This is the model that is being increasingly adopted, for example by the Bar Standards Board and the Solicitors Regulatory Authority."

The ARMA annual conference, held this year on 5.10.11, is the largest event of its kind in the sector. The 500 plus managing agents packed the QEII Conference Centre in Westminster to hear leading industry figures speak on the work being done to increase professionalism and raise standards further. Having sold out for the 16th year running the Conference also attracted government representatives, RMC Directors, lawyers and accountants as well as property managers from the United States, Australia, Ireland and Scotland.

Delegates heard about the work being done by ARMA, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) in defining best practice for accounting for service charges. This is something that has been desperately needed ever since the Government decided not to introduce long awaited new accounting regulations under the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002. The new best practice guide will set out what leaseholders can expect in terms of the content of service charge accounts and the reporting accountant's involvement.

Other topics of the day involved an update on the latest legislation as well as news on the professional qualifications offered to leasehold block managers by the Institute of Residential Property Management and RICS, and the serious parking issues that could be caused by the Protection of Freedoms Bill currently going through parliament and how this is likely to affect leaseholders.

Rounding off the presentations was the lead ombudsman of Ombudsman Services: Property who reviewed the types of complaints they had dealt with relating to leasehold management and recommended how to handle complaints professionally and positively. It has been a requirement for ARMA members to belong to a recognised ombudsman service for nearly two years now.

Peter Denning, ARMA's chairman, commented at the end of the day "I was delighted to see our Conference sell out yet again and with so many practitioners attending. Although the primary

purpose of our conference is to impart knowledge and understanding, we also aim to make it an experience. We achieved that this year with a live interview of a Residents Management Company Director by TV presenter Martin Roberts and a mock Leasehold Valuation Tribunal case chaired by Angus Andrew of the Residential Property Tribunal Service.

"Our annual conference is important for the leasehold sector as it is the one time in the year when so many managing agents can get together to demonstrate their real commitment to professionalism."

Commenting on the announcement from ARMA that it plans to separate the regulation of property management agents from the Association's work representing the industry, Rupert Roker, Policy Manager at Consumer Focus who also attended the Conference said: "Property management matters to consumers and good property management makes an enormous difference to the lives of people living in blocks of flats. The public needs to be confident in the regulation of this industry and we hope that ARMA's new direction will be able to raise standards generally across the sector."

**ENDS**

### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. Formed in 1991, ARMA is the only body in England and Wales to focus exclusively on matters relating to the management of long leasehold residential property. The association has over 260 firms in membership that between them manage some 900,000 units in more than 34,000 blocks of flats or estates (at least 60% of which are lessee-controlled properties). ARMA's founding principal aims are to represent its members and the interests of lessees, resident management companies and investor freeholders. More information on the association can be found at [www.arma.org.uk](http://www.arma.org.uk).
2. Press release in Word format and pictures of the Conference are available on request.

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