



PRESS RELEASE

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FINDING A WAY FORWARD ON HOUSING FINANCE

Tenants, housing officers and councillors are banding together to find ways to transform the current finance system and provide a viable future for council housing.

The Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) ran a consultation event in London on 24th November to gather members' views for its official response to the Treasury and Department for Communities and Local Government joint review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Subsidy System, which will conclude in March.

Brian Reilly, deputy director of housing at the London Borough of Wandsworth, described how ARCH is working to influence the review. He said: 'Stock retention is not a dogma, but a practical solution to the national housing crisis. We want a long-term future for council housing and are particularly pleased to welcome tenants and residents whose views on HRA are being taken on board in our response to the review.'

Anne Kirkham, the civil servant who is overseeing the review, echoed the importance of involving tenants in developing proposals: 'We are trying to get the best possible understanding of the tenant perspective on what they want out of the system.'

She told delegates that the government's requirements for any new regime include that it should be: fair and affordable for both tenants and taxpayers; transparent; set a minimum standard for services; encourage quality improvement; provide more certainty; and not expose government to unacceptable financial risks.

Paul O'Brien, chief executive of the Association for Public Service Excellence, which provides a secretariat, research and lobbying role for ARCH, told delegates: 'This is the best chance in a generation to influence government thinking. We have to consider the future of the HRA in the wider context of the current economic climate, the fact that there are 1.6m people on waiting lists for council properties and local government's community leadership role.'

He added: 'Council housing offers security quality, affordability and accountability and is closely integrated with a wide range of community

issues; including environmental sustainability, regeneration, and services to elderly and vulnerable people and children.'

ARCH has been closely involved in HRA working parties on; rents and subsidies; costs and standards; rules governing the HRA; and mechanisms for delivering funding. Workshops on these topics were held throughout the day to formulate ARCH's detailed proposals on reforming the existing regime.