

Arch **news**

a fair deal for all our residents

Newsletter of The Association of Retained Council Housing

Number 5 Summer 2010

Making the case for a fairer future

ARCH will continue to push for a fair, local self-financing model in its response to the current 'offer' on reform of the housing finance system.

The Department for Communities and Local Government published *Council Housing: A real future (Prospectus)*, on 25th March, which set out proposals for reforming the unpopular Housing Revenue Account (HRA) system and enabling greater local control in exchange for authorities taking on debt. The deadline for responses to the proposals is 6th July and ARCH is seeking members' views to inform its official submission.

The association's secretary, John Bibby, director of housing and community services at Lincoln City Council, has written to all ARCH members asking for their opinion on the proposals. He said: 'Our understanding is that the proposals would give stock retained authorities the local con-

trol over resources we sought and ARCH supports the principles of the current offer. The executive is aware, however, that there are concerns among some individual member authorities about specific aspects of the proposals which need to be addressed.'

ARCH has organised a number of consultation events for members since the review of HRA was initially launched two years ago. The latest proposals were discussed at a meeting at the Local Government Association headquarters on 4th May, attended by more than 120 housing and finance officers from stock retained councils. During this event, Steve Partridge of CIH, who was commissioned by ARCH to undertake modelling work among its members, outlined the potential impact of the proposals on case study authorities. There was broad support for the self-financial model put forward in the prospectus

and councils have been determining what this offer means in their own individual circumstances.

ARCH awaits full details of the new Coalition Government's plans for council housing. It is encouraged by the commitment to continue the consultation on finance, to enable greater local freedom and overhaul what housing minister Grant Shapps acknowledges as an 'unfair' system.

Mr Bibby said: 'We have the tantalising prospect of reform of housing finance. We need to make sure that, in dealing with the overall national debt, council housing does not lose out. We are continuing to argue the case for a more sustainable future for council housing.'

ARCH has written to the housing minister inviting him to meet its members, outline his perspective on the future of council housing and hear their views.

DIARY

22 June: CIH reception at Betty's Tearooms, Harrogate. 5-7pm
ARCH is hosting a reception for its members and friends at Betty's Tearooms in Harrogate during this year's Chartered Institute of Housing annual conference.

The event is a chance to enjoy canapés and drinks at this famous café, hear about the work and future plans of ARCH and network with others professionals and politicians with an interest in council housing.

Contact: email@arch-housing.org.uk

28 June: Tenants' sub-group meeting, London. 11am

The ARCH tenants' sub-group is holding its next meeting at the Methodist International Centre in London. The group has been set up to ensure the views of people who live in local authority homes are fed into the organisation's activities.

Contact: Nigel.long@tpas.org.uk

9 July: ARCH AGM, London

At the Local Government Association headquarters in Smith Square, London at 11am. Speakers will include Paul O'Brien, chief executive of APSE, who will outline latest policy developments for the stock retained sector and Abigail Davies of CIH, who will discuss latest research.

We hope that all members will be able to attend. ARCH is now in its fourth year and, as this newsletter shows, membership, profile and activities are growing. ARCH wishes to hear from its members about how best to move forward in the coming year and beyond

The agenda and papers are available on the website at: www.arch-housing.org.uk

Contact ARCH's secretary, John Bibby, on tel: 01522 873200 or email: john.bibby@lincoln.gov.uk



Celebrating council housing

Tenants pictured here with Cornwall Council community development officer Tania Horrocks were among 120 delegates from across England who got together on 13th May for the fourth annual ARCH Tenants' and Residents' Conference. The event was hosted by ARCH member authority Birmingham City Council, the largest stock retainer in the country, which has 68,000 properties. See centre spread for a report on the event.

All photographs: Birmingham City Council

ARCH Tenants' and Residents' Conference 2010



Tenants heard from speakers including the TSA and took part in an 'open forum' discussion which focused primarily on reform of housing finance.

Showing support

People who live in local authority homes showed their support for stock retention when they got together in Birmingham for their fourth annual conference.

The ARCH Tenants' and Residents' Conference 2010 was hosted by the country's largest stock retainer, Birmingham City Council, which has 68,000 properties, at the prestigious Banqueting Suite at Birmingham Council House.

Tenants and residents from across England who have chosen to stick with their local authority as their landlord met on 13th May to hear speakers on latest developments in the sector, air their views and take part in workshops.

The Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Cllr Michael Wilkes, officially opened the event, saying these are 'crucial times' for council housing and that the event was extremely timely.

Marlene Price, chair of ARCH tenants' sub-group and resident representative on the ARCH executive board, said: 'As ARCH grows, our voice as tenants and residents grows. This event shows the strength of feeling among people who live in local authority homes that stock retention is the best option. It is the only option based on genuine democratic accountability.'

She said the review of the HRA system topped the list of 'significant issues' facing those who live in stock retained properties: 'We as residents have a role to play in ensuring that our views are also conveyed to central government.'

The tenants' sub-group was instrumental in arranging the venue and programme for the event, which was organised by APSE. Birmingham City Council's cabinet member for housing, Cllr John Lines, thanked local resident and ARCH tenants' sub-group member Jim Nicholl in particular, for his hard work helping to make the event a success.

Cllr Lines commented: 'Tenants in Birmingham made it very clear on a number of occasions that they wanted to remain with the council as their landlord. I gave a commitment to improve their homes to the Decent Homes standard and I am proud that we have been able to exceed the government's target.'

He added: 'We joined ARCH to work alongside other retained stock authorities to lobby the government for a change in the biased and unfair subsidy system and to pursue other matters of which we share a common interest... Tenants are at the heart of all we do in Birmingham and will continue to be the driving force of service improvements and developments in housing.'

Brindha Nathan, domain policy manager at the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) described how TSA has been regulating council housing as of 1st April. She said: 'We are asking tenants to talk to their councils. Tenants in different local areas may have different priorities and must talk to their landlords about creating local offers.'

Other topics covered during speeches and workshops included: tackling rent arrears in Birmingham; using systems thinking

to reduce waiting lists in Milton Keynes; building new homes in Broxtowe; and the holistic benefits of retained council housing in South Derbyshire and Wandsworth.

Feedback on HRA

Consultant Graham Martin led a session on reform of the HRA, which topped the list of discussion points during an open forum at the conference.

Mr Martin said that under latest proposals control would be with the council, which would be better able to plan and have more money to invest in housing. 'While the trade off is that councils will need to take on debt, the typical council will be able to repay debt after 20 years.'

According to tenants who voiced concerns during the discussion, the principal issues to be addressed under a new self-financing regime are:

- potential rent rises;
- taking on debt;
- ring-fencing of housing resources;
- and monitoring local financing.

Next year's event

It has been agreed that the ARCH Tenants' and Residents' Conference 2011 event will be more tenant-led. This would feature presentations and workshops run by people who live in council homes to stimulate greater information-sharing between tenants from stock retained authorities across the country. Advanced planning for the next event will be taken up in the tenants' sub-group's future work programme.

Best practice award winners

Croydon and Southwark were the winners of the ARCH Best Practice Awards 2010.

The ARCH awards provide an opportunity for stock retained councils to share best practice and learn from each other. They were presented by secretary, John Bibby, during the tenants' and residents' conference.

Tenant Michael Hewlett (pictured top right) collected the ARCH Tenant Participation Award 2010 on behalf of Croydon Council.

Tenant sub-group chair Marlene Price, one of the judges of the awards, said that Croydon won the award for measures including development of the national resident involvement champions, learning exchanges, and involvement of residents in capital programmes, environmental improvements,

youth provision and selection of contractors. Croydon has reviewed the effectiveness of all participation activities and details outputs, outcomes and value for money to ensure the most effective and efficient methods are used.

Tenant and leaseholder participation compact manager, Ross Lambert (pictured bottom right) collected the Green Efficiencies Award on behalf of Southwark Council.

Mrs Price said Southwark won the award for its initiative to insulate wall cavities. This innovation means that the council can fill the cavities in high rise buildings without the need for expensive and unsightly scaffolding. The insulation has made energy savings of at least £50 per year for each household.



Tenants' sub-group elects vice-chair

The ARCH tenants' sub-group has elected a vice-chair to support its chair Marlene Price.

The group appointed Jennifer Holmes from West Lancashire District Council when it met on 29th March. As well as involvement in an estate management board and tenants' and residents' forum, she is also a member of the West Lancashire Local Strategic Partnership and the TSA Tenants' Panel.

The ARCH tenants' sub-group is a regional network of tenant representatives from member authorities. It was set up last year to ensure the opinions of those who live in local authority housing are taken into account in the organisation's decision-making structure. It is a sub-group of the

ARCH executive board.

Marlene Price represents local authority tenants and residents on the executive board and liaises between the executive and the tenants' sub-group. She will now be supported and shadowed by Jennifer Holmes, who will deputise in her absence.

The Tenants Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) supports the sub-group, which meets on a quarterly basis, facilitated by Nigel Long, head of policy at TPAS.

The next tenants' sub-group meeting takes place in at the Methodist International Centre in London at 11am on Monday 28th June. Among the topics to be discussed will be key issues and challenges of the new Government, the Relationship with the TSA and an update on HRA reform.



Above Marlene Price (left) with new sub-group vice-chair Jennifer Holmes.

Below The ARCH tenants' sub-group includes representatives from: Birmingham, Canterbury, Cornwall, City of London, Crawley, Croydon, Exeter, Great Yarmouth, Harlow, Lewes, Lincoln City, Norwich, Stoke, Runnymede, Wandsworth and West Lancashire.



Research update

The ARCH executive has been taking forward the association's research programme.

Under One Roof: The holistic benefits of council housing was launched in March (see right). Topics identified as priorities at the Chief Housing Officers' conference in Warwick and during an email survey of members were: reform of HRA; council house-building; domain regulation; local co-ordination of performance standards; benchmarking; CAA and social housing; and joint commissioning with health and social care partners.

So far, CIH Consult has undertaken extensive modelling work on the HRA, the results of which are available in the members' area of the website:

APSE has also been commissioned to investigate value for money and local authority house-building, on which a scoping paper is imminent. ARCH members are keen to build new homes, demonstrating that the economic value of council building is pertinent in the climate of public sector funding cuts.

CIH policy director, Abigail Davies, is beginning research on Preparing for Annual Standards Reports. She will discuss early findings at the ARCH AGM on 9th July.

A discussion will take place on ARCH's further research programme at that event. The ARCH executive will consider further research projects that are appropriate to stock

retained authorities according to priorities, timing and budgets.

In-house housing means added value, says report

Keeping properties directly owned and managed by the council can have additional benefits for a range of other local government services, the results of research reveals.

Under One Roof: The holistic benefits of council housing has been published by ARCH in partnership with APSE. The research, which entailed a survey, interviews with tenants and case studies, shows the way in which direct control of housing stock can help fulfil wider economic, social and environmental goals and enable local services to be delivered in a more joined-up way. As one tenant interviewed said: 'If any of us have problems, they point us in the right direction and the help is all under one roof.'

Case studies include: Canterbury, South Derbyshire, Wandsworth, Warwick and West Lancashire.

The report was launched at the Tower of London on 25th March. Copies have been posted to ARCH member authorities and are available for ARCH members to download free in PDF format from the members' only area of the website. For further printed copies, contact: mbaines@apse.org.uk

More new members for ARCH

Membership of ARCH continues to expand, taking the total number of homes owned and managed by member authorities to almost 470,000.

A total of 55 councils have now signed up to ARCH and four more memberships are currently in the pipeline. The latest members to join ARCH are: Gosport, North Kesteven, Nuneaton and Utlesford and Mid Suffolk.

Have you got your password?

Selected material is now available on-line in a members-only area of the ARCH website.

Information, including meeting agendas and minutes and briefings, is available on a restricted access basis for ARCH members, who have been sent passwords.

If you do not have a password, please contact: jfurniss@apse.org.uk

Arch Join together for a better future for council housing

Council housing now has a higher profile

ARCH has become increasingly prominent in the past year. We intend to extend our influence further in 2009-10 and continue to bring stock retainers together to secure a better future for residents.

ARCH offers:

- A collective voice for one million people who live in council homes
- Campaigns for fairer finance and better opportunities for stock retainers
- Performance improvement
- Conferences and seminars

- Best practice sharing
- A vital information and support network
- Expert policy analysis

Benefits of ARCH membership include:

- A collective voice for stock retainers
- Lobbying for fairer finance and better opportunities
- Free access to annual tenants' and residents' conference for up to six delegates
- Subsidised access to chief officers' conference
- At least three free seminars on topical issues per year
- Regular updates on relevant news
- Up to ten expert policy briefings a year on latest issues facing stock retainers
- Free copies of ARCH News members' newsletter delivered three times a year
- A forum for sharing best practice
- Discounted HouseMark membership fee and exclusive access to stock retainers' performance improvement club
- Free access to Association for Public Service Excellence housing advisory groups
- Local Government Association housing advisors' panel representation
- Recognition as statutory CLG consultee
- TPAS tenant participation support



Join ARCH

ARCH membership costs £2,000 per year. Membership is open to all authorities that have completed a Housing Option Appraisal and decided to retain ownership and management of all or part of their stock.

For further information on ARCH membership, contact:

*John Bibby, ARCH Secretary
Director of Housing and Community Services,
City of Lincoln Council, City Hall, Lincoln LN1 1DE
01522-873200, email@arch-housing.org.uk*