

ARCH Tenant Conference (18 September 2018) Report

The Way Forward for Tenants and the Green Paper

1. ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

This annual conference for ARCH members is organised by tenants for tenants. The ARCH Tenants' Group have worked closely with HouseMark's Event team to plan and develop the programme and venue arrangements. The chair of the ARCH Tenants' Group chaired the conference, members of the Tenants' Group chaired the workshops, registered and greeted delegates as they arrived and helped with other event management tasks on the day.

97 delegates attended this year, the 12th ARCH Tenant Group Conference. The Conference discussions were dominated by the Social Housing Green Paper. The event took place at Kettering Conference Centre and was generously supported by Kettering District Council.

As well, as embedding a link to the individual presentations within each section of this report, the link below provides access to all the presentations.

<https://www.housemark.co.uk/media/2220/all-slides.pdf>

2. WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS

Jenny Hill, ARCH Tenants' Group Chair

Jenny opened the conference, welcoming delegates and encouraging participation. In the light of the Green Paper Jenny was also keen to encourage tenants to act and work together to make a difference and address stigma.

3. MAYOR'S ADDRESS

Councillor James Burton, Mayor of the Borough of Kettering

Councillor Burton welcomed delegates to Kettering and thanked the ARCH Tenants' Group for the invitation. He stressed the importance of both retaining council housing, but also allowing council to flourish and increase future supply.

4. OPENING PLENARY: TENANTS & THE GREEN PAPER

Jane Everton, Deputy Director Social Housing, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

Chair: Brian Reilly, Director of Housing and Regeneration, London Borough of Wandsworth

Jane explained what the Green Paper means to the sector, council housing and most importantly to tenants. She said the Green Paper was born of a national conversation about social housing. The Paper was widely consulted on, prior to publishing.

Jane introduced the main aspects of the Green Paper as follows:

- Homes are safe and decent
- Effective resolution of complaints
- Exploring the strengthening of regulation - specifically around consumer standards
- Tackling stigma
- Expanding supply
- Supporting home ownership.

Jane invited delegates and their councils to respond to the Green Paper, making specific mention of how RTB receipts can be used to build more homes.

Jane was followed on the platform by Brian Reilly. Brian started off by stressing ARCH's commitment to tenants. He stated that ARCH was the only national organisation to have a formal tenant group. Tenants are at the heart of what ARCH do and ARCH's response to the consultation will include the outcome of the Tenants' Group Green Paper consultation

In response to Jane's address, Brian, on behalf of ARCH, welcomed many of ideas within the Green Paper, but argued that more needs to be done. Example included:

- The decent homes standards is too narrowly defined and does not extend to neighborhoods, internal areas or improving energy efficiency
- Complaints – there is the need to identify patterns of complaints and identify the important ones. Brian went on to talk about the role of Designated Person. He argued that this is not widely understood, despite containing some valuable aspects of complaints resolution
- New performance indicators and league tables have been proposed as a way of holding landlords to account, but how will these be designed to address residents' issues? What are the performance measures that tenants are genuinely interested in?
- Tackling stigma – Brian challenged Jane's view that stigma towards tenants existed within councils. Council workers were often the advocates of tenants. The problem exists in the way the media report council housing matters. His final point here was that the Green Paper itself could be promoting stigma, in that it sees social housing tenure as a spring board in to home ownership. This implies home ownership is in some way superior
- There needs to be a balance struck between housing need and the financial head room to enable councils to build more homes. While the increase in the borrowing cap for some was welcomed, it needs to be for all councils if they are to make a significant contribution to increasing housing supply

Brian concluded by broadly welcoming the paper and specifically welcomed the proposal that councils' higher value properties won't be sold to fund housing association RTB.

The session was followed by a question and answer session. Topics included; tenant and decent homes, planning in urban areas – balancing homes and neighborhoods, funding of resident involvement, repeal of fixed term tenancies/pay to stay, stigma and how they supply of social housing will help this.

<https://www.housemark.co.uk/media/2223/jane-evertons-presentation.pdf>

<https://www.housemark.co.uk/media/2221/brian-reillys-presentation.pdf>

5. COMMUNITY CHAMPION AWARD PRESENTATION

Jenny Hill, ARCH Tenants' Group Chair

Jenny introduced the award presentation. The nominations were:

Graham Cridland, Crawley Borough Council

Guy Pile-Grey, LB of Croydon

Les King, Norwich City Council

Terry Adkin, Norwich City Council

Ella Webster, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

The Committee of the Arndale Youth Club, LB Wandsworth

The joint winners were:

Ella Webster, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council for her work engaging with young people in council housing.

The Committee of the Arndale Youth Club, LB Wandsworth who devised an activity programme for young people (8 to 14-year olds). The activity programme included a range of activities that promote creativity, physical challenge and explores issue's important to young people such as on-line safety.

6. NETWORKING LUNCH

7. WORKSHOP 1: CONSUMER REDRESS

Emma Foxhall, Deputy Ombudsman, Housing Ombudsman Service

Chair: Stella Brown, ARCH Tenants' Group

Emma stated off explaining what the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) does – supporting landlords to resolve complaints more effectively and investigating complaints once the landlords' internal processes had been exhausted.

For HOS to be more effective landlords need to improve their internal processes and complaint outcomes. If the Social Housing Regulator's Consumer Standard are beefed up she asked delegates to think about what measure the regulator should put in place to evidence effective complaints management.

Questions followed on the effectiveness of Tenant Panels and Designated Persons, the remit of HOS in relation to the Local Government Ombudsman and wait times for responses from HOS.

<https://www.housemark.co.uk/media/2222/emma-foxalls-presentation.pdf>

8. WORKSHOP 2: BENEFIT TO SOCIETY

Leslie Channon, Non-executive Director, TPAS

Chair: Chris Gould, ARCH Tenants' Group

The campaign was originally launched on Facebook to present positive stories of people in council homes. The aim is to change the narrative, but what more can be done? Delegates generated ideas, such as include provision for social housing tenants within anti-discrimination legislation.

<https://www.housemark.co.uk/media/2225/leslie-channons-and-yaw-john-boatengs-presentation.pdf>

9. FEEDBACK FROM WORKSHOPS

Stella Parkin, ARCH Tenants' Group Member

Chris Gould, ARCH Tenants' Group Member

Stella and Chris gave an overview of the workshop presentations and discussions.

10. CLOSING PLENARY: KNOWING THE STANDARDS EXPECTED FROM YOUR COUNCIL

Leona Mantle, Tenancy Services Manager, Kettering Borough Council

Martyn Lund, ARCH Tenants' Group Member, Kettering Borough Council

Leona and Martyn set out in detail what tenants should expect from their council by drawing on the experiences at Kettering District Council.

They stated that reporting performance in an open and transparent way was one of the most important aspects in engaging tenants and using a variety of methods to communicate this. Engaging tenants is a big part of Kettering's success. Approaches include:

- The Tenants Forum as part of council committee structure. New ideas are tested with tenants before going to the Executive and the full council for approval
- Tenant Overview and Scrutiny Panel (see below)
- Environ Improvements Panel
- Small scheme funding –community led estate improvements
- Tenant Representatives. These are the eyes and ears of the community

- Tenant Inspectors. Inspecting services and linked to scrutiny
- Editorial Panel of Newsletter
- Involvement in procurement and contract management
- Ad hoc – focus groups, working groups, 'meet and greet', etc.

Martyn presented the council's approach to scrutiny, delivered by the Tenant Overview and Scrutiny Panel. In summary the approach was; tenant led, access to all relevant information and covering all landlord functions.

Using various insights, the tenants determined the areas of scrutiny and worked with officers in investigation service effectiveness. A report was generated, falling out of this is an action plan that is then monitored. An assessment of the impact of the actions is made, including calculating cost savings.

Finally, more work has been done to establish links between involved tenant and wider tenant body, so there is a better understanding of the work of involved tenants and better representation of the views of the wider tenant body.

<https://www.housemark.co.uk/media/2226/martyn-lund-and-leona-mantle-s-presentation.pdf>

11. CHAIR CLOSING COMMENTS

Jenny concluded the conference by thanking those that helped organize it, including the Tenant Group and thanked delegates for their contributions.