

ARCH Tenant Conference (3 October 2019)

“Keeping your home safe”

Conference Report

1. ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

The 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, develop and deliver the programme.

77 delegates attended the 13th ARCH Tenant Group Conference held this year by the sea in Bridlington at the Bridlington Spa. The conference theme this year, 'keeping your homes safe', reflected tenants' concerns in the aftermath of the Grenfell disaster and in anticipation of the government's response to the Green Paper.

The link below provides access to all the presentations.

http://www.arch-housing.org.uk/media/133324/arch_tenants_conference_2019_all_slides.pdf

2. WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS

Jenny Hill, ARCH Tenants' Group Chair

Jenny opened the conference, welcomed delegates and encouraged participation. In addition to introducing the theme of the conference, Jenny also spoke about the Addison Act, with this year marking 100 years of council housing. One of the morning sessions was dedicated to this, celebrating the Act.

In addition to hearing from experts in the areas of fire safety and gas and electrical safety, Jenny also introduced a speaker from the Regulator of Social Housing on current arrangements for and anticipated changes to the regulation of social housing to keep tenants safe and improve tenant redress – making sure their voices are heard.

On this theme, one of the workshops was presented by the Housing Ombudsman Service, detailing how, through supporting better complaints handling, they are making sure tenants' voices are heard. The second workshop, presented by East Riding of Yorkshire Council shared the findings from their consultation on the future of sheltered housing, setting out next steps to making a new offer to tenants.

3. MAYOR'S ADDRESS

Councillor Pat Smith, Chairman, East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Councillor Smith welcomed delegates to Bridlington and thanked the ARCH Tenants' Group for the invitation. She went on to say how pleased she was that the ARCH Tenant Group had chosen Bridlington as the venue for this year's event.

4. CELEBRATING THE ADDISON ACT – 100 YEARS OF COUNCIL HOUSING

Stella Parkin, ARCH Tenant Group Member, Rotherham Federation

John Kite, ARCH Tenant Group Member, Sheffield City Council

Stella and John set out the background to the Addison Act and how the centenary of the Act was being commemorated and celebrated by their local authorities. Stella described how her council celebrated 100 years of the ACT by hosting a tenant conference, promoted and exhibited and informed tenants through the resident magazine what the Act meant locally when it was passed.

John followed by telling delegates about his personal housing journey via the video article broadcast on BBC Breakfast News. John showcased the Flower Estate in Sheffield and spoke about what a decent home means to him, his family and the wider community.

5. OPENING PLENARY. KEEPING YOUR HOMES SAFE

5.1 Fire safety.

William Davidson, Fire Risk Assessor, HFR Solutions, CIC and Fire Protection Associate

5.2 Gas and Electrical safety

Marc Cross, Robert Welsh and Graham-Campbell Wilson, The Gas Company

Each of the speakers gave a useful and practical over-sight of health and safety in the home, setting out both landlord and tenant responsibilities, as well as an overview of legislation and regulation.

William, as a fire safety associate also described some of the common issues with fire in the home and how the problems were typically made worse by damaged doors, missing closing devices, strips and seals. Blocked means of escape or where the means of escape was made difficult because of a lack of maintenance and cluttered corridors was also a factor.

Robert and Graham-Campbell spoke about the importance of regular electrical testing and gas servicing and described the dangers of carbon monoxide as a silent killer. They set out some practical tips to reduce the danger of monoxide poisoning, such as making sure tenants don't block air vents and installing carbon monoxide alarms.

5.3 The Future of safety Regulation

Jonathan Walters, Deputy Chief Executive, Regulator of Social Housing

Despite being restricted in what he could say, given that the government had not yet provided a formal response to the Green Paper, Jonathan was able to provide a helpful overview of regulation, setting out the government's intended direction of travel. The

tragedy at Grenfell has resulted in a number of proposed changes in this area, such as the establishment of a new Building Safety Regulator. Also, the development of more rigorous and enforceable Consumer Standards, where landlords will have to demonstrate compliance.

This session was followed by an excellent question and answer discussion, that focused on not just questions pertaining to individual tenants' circumstances, where tenants were seeking advice, but also the regulatory side too. Issues such as tenants' rights, the potential for overlap and confusion with the Ombudsman service proposals and the current 'stay put' fire service advice were debated.

6. COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS AWARD

The following Community Champions nominations were received. Their hard work and community contribution was recognised by the judging panel:

- Sana Benali, nominated by Hull City Council
- Helen Fitzpatrick, nominated by Hull City Council
- Kerry Jones, nominated by Hull City Council
- Ann Reekie, nominated by Hull City Council
- Christopher Rogers, nominated by Hull City Council
- TARA Digital Champion, nominated by Sheffield City Council

The winner of this year's Community Champions Award was **Chris Rogers**, a tenant with Hull City Council.

Despite his health problems, Chris has been a driving force in his area and beyond. He was recognised by the judges for not just being involved but showing leadership and making a difference. For example, Chris was recognised for his leading role in the designated complaints panel, taking part, but also taking on the role as Chair and leading the review of its terms of reference. In his role as Vice-Chair on the Communications Panel he has ensure effective engagement with tenants, thought their preferred communication channels and in the use of plain English.

Chris's confidence continued to grow when he put himself forward and was elected Secretary of the Tenants' Forum Committee communicating the needs of all tenants across the city with skill and diplomacy. Finally, as an active participant of his local group, he has been the driving force for a number of initiatives ranging from the development of a communal garden to working in partnership with the Council on health and safety issue.

Sana Benali, a tenant with Hull City Council was awarded the Highly Commended accolade.

Sana, although relatively new to actively working for her community has been a driving force within her local community. Despite other commitments, she has undertaken a range of activities, including running a children's club during the term time, establishing a group

for women from black and ethnic minorities to build members confidence, organizing a cultural party and raising awareness of the positive activity that takes place in her local area.

The Judging Panel included ARCH Tenant Group members Jenny Hill, Mavis Vines and Marlene Price.

John Bibby congratulated Hull City Council for having so many amazing tenants and hope this will encourage more councils to recognize their tenants and put them forward for next year's award.

7. WORKSHOP 1: THE FUTURE OF SHLETERED HOUSING

Helen McEgan, Principal Asset Officer and John Marginson, Development and Implementation Lead, East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Helen and John firstly set out the reasons for the sheltered housing review. This included the over-supply of an offer that was seen by most as being out of date and not meeting current needs and aspirations. The vision of the service was set out, along with clear project objectives. Tenants played a big part in the plans for re-shaping of the service and Helen and John shared some of the feedback they received that will inform the new direction going forward.

8. WORKSHOP 2: HOUSING COMPLAINTS – WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

David Simmons, Sector Development Lead, The Housing Ombudsman Service

David set out the role of the Housing Ombudsman Service, to receive and adjudicate on complaints, support the resolution of complaints and reduce complaints re-occurring. This is achieved by applying the dispute resolution principles of; fairness, putting right wrongs and learning from complaints. David then went through some statistics, including the number and the type of complaints they received, with complaints about repairs and anti-social behavior being the highest categories. Finally, delegates were told of the Ombudsman Services response to the Green Paper, this included opposition to the use of Designated Persons as a condition before applying to the Ombudsman. However, the Ombudsman was supportive of the use of Tenant Complaints Panels as a means of mediation and resolving complaints. Finally, David went through some aspects of the Service's Three-Year Strategy.

Back in the main hall, delegates were given a brief overview of each of the workshops by Tenant Group members, Nev Allison and Martyn Lund.

9. CLOSING PLENARY: THE FUTURE FOR COUNCIL HOUSING – WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

John Bibby, Chief Executive, ARCH

John set out how council housing has fared since 2010, identifying it as an area where government of different persuasions have sought to implement their policy agenda. This included; changes to regulation, changes to the Right to Buy, approaches to rent setting policy and a whole host of welfare reform legislation. Home ownership and the Right to Buy

continues to be a key policy area focus of all governments. John demonstrated the impact Right to Buy has had in the decline in council housing both in real terms and as a proportion of all housing tenures with council housing now making up only 6% of the total housing stock.

In more recent times the fall of Theresa May's government saw the end of an administration that was broadly supportive of council housing including the introduction of policies which saw the scrapping of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap that is allowing many local authorities to build new council housing again.

John commented that Grenfell was the "game changer" in this period. The loss of 72 lives in the fire at a high-rise building sent shock waves through government and the housing sector as a whole. The response:

- Setting up of the Grenfell Public Inquiry
- Review of building regulations & fire safety led by Dame Judith Hackitt
- The Social Housing Green Paper

However, John noted that progress is slow, and little has changed as yet under the new government led by Boris Johnson and, up to the date of the conference, there have been no significant policy announcements or additional investment in council housing.

John concluded by saying that we await to see what the future of council housing will be in a post Brexit world, but assured delegates that ARCH will continue to make the case for council housing.

10. CHAIR CLOSING COMMENTS

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