

Under one roof

The holistic benefits of retained council housing

A report by ARCH/APSE March 2010



Under one roof:

The holistic benefits of retained council housing

A report by ARCH/APSE
March 2010



Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE)

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a not-for-profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK promoting excellence in public services. APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services, hosting a network for frontline service providers in housing, waste and refuse collection, parks and environmental services, leisure, school meals, cleaning, housing and building maintenance.

For further information on APSE visit: www.apse.org.uk

Contact: pbrennan@apse.org.uk



Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH)

The Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) was set up for councils whose tenants have chosen the local authority as their landlord. ARCH brings councils who own and manage housing together to get the best deal for their tenants. It represents collective interests of stock retained councils nationally, lobbies for a fairer, clearer finance system to allow councils to provide affordable homes in a sustainable way, promotes best practice, listens to the views of tenants and demonstrates the benefits of retained stock in meeting wider local and national priorities.

For further information ARCH visit: www.arch-housing.org.uk

Contact: arch@email.org.uk

Authors

This report was written by Phil Brennan, policy advisor specialising in housing at APSE and Nicola Carroll, freelance writer and researcher and consultant to APSE and ARCH.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the tenants and residents, professionals and politicians who have participated in interviews, case studies and the on-line survey conducted while researching this report. In particular we would like to thank Abigail Davies of CIH, Bob Livermore of West Lancashire District Council and ARCH the executive board, and Paul O'Brien and Gayle Gibson of APSE for their help in shaping this project.

“A roof over your head is important for everything. You can then build the rest of your life if you have that security.”

“If any of us have problems they point us in the right direction and the help is all under one roof.”

Contents

Foreword	7
Executive summary	8
1: Policy context	13
2: Results	25
3: Case studies	
West Lancashire	35
Canterbury	39
Carmarthenshire	40
Midlothian	42
Milton Keynes	43
South Derbyshire	43
Wandsworth	45
Warwick	46
4: Recommendations	47
Conclusion	50
Methodology	51
References	52
Appendices	
1. List of stock retained councils and number of properties owned in England	54
2. Scottish Housing Survey Table Estimated stock of dwellings by tenure 1983-2008	56

This report shows how stock retained authorities have delivered real and additional benefits to their councils and communities

Foreword

HOUSING is one of the most basic human needs. The availability, existence and condition of homes has a fundamental impact on the health and well-being, educational attainment, employment opportunities and safety of those who live within them. If affordable housing is managed effectively, social and economic development, regeneration and planning deliver far greater added value. There are also vital links between housing and social care and transport, local neighbourhoods and wider environmental impacts. Housing is therefore essential in local government's aims of creating safe, sustainable, cohesive and thriving places where people want to live.

ARCH and APSE are pleased that housing has risen up the political agenda prior to and during the recession and in the run-up to a General Election. The economic downturn has meant recognition of the value of housing in providing jobs and much-needed homes has been recognised by all political parties and the political climate now seems more favourable toward council housing than it has been for decades.

Our members from local authorities of all political colours who own and manage their own properties recognise how important this is to local people. Tenants have chosen their local authority to be their landlord despite the odds often being stacked against this option and their local authority landlords have risen to the challenge despite limited resources.

ARCH and APSE have campaigned for a more level playing field upon which stock retainers can operate. The outlook for councils that own and manage housing is more promising than it has been previously; with housing finance reform proposals under way and finance arrangements available that enable councils to build new homes. There is an increasing emphasis on local government's strategic housing role. Additionally, the role of councils as 'place-shapers' and community leaders has become more prominent and local authorities are becoming ever more engaged with other public, private and third sector partners.

To date, however, there has been a paucity of research looking at the specific role of local authorities whose tenants have chosen their council to be their landlord. The time is ripe for a study to be undertaken which explores the additional benefits local authority ownership and management of homes can bring to councils and the communities they serve.

APSE and ARCH carried out this joint research project to examine the benefits of retained council housing in meeting local authorities' wider strategic goals. The primary role of retained council housing is to provide and manage affordable homes for local people and they are doing so to a high standard. The benefits explored in this report are all additional to that primary role. This report shows how stock retained authorities have delivered real and additional benefits to their councils and communities despite lack of resources and a certain lack of control of those resources. It argues that an appropriate policy and funding framework built upon greater freedoms and flexibilities to act would allow these benefits to be more fully realised. For stock holding authorities the ability to act more independently to meet local needs and aspirations must be fully explored and realised in future policy. This research provides evidence of the rewards that could be reaped nationally from doing so in terms of addressing social, economic and environmental concerns and in better meeting the needs and aspirations of social tenants and residents.

We hope politicians of all parties will take note and provide the framework and finance local authorities need to really maximise benefits of housing being 'under one roof' with other services.

Cllr Milan Radulovic, MBE, national chair of ARCH and housing, leisure and culture portfolio holder, Broxtowe BC

Paul O'Brien, chief executive of APSE

Executive summary

Introduction

THIS report examines whether local authority ownership and management of housing offers ‘added value’ in terms of supporting councils in delivering economic, social and environmental goals at both a policy and practice level. The approach to this research is from the standpoint of authorities whose tenants have voted for their council to be their landlord. Both ARCH and APSE recognise the value of a plurality of housing providers. The aim was not to be critical of other social housing options but to explore in detail the ways in which stock retention can benefit local government in its delivery of a wide-range of activities and outcomes.

For the purposes of this research ‘stock retained council housing’ is defined as properties that are directly owned and managed by the local authority. It is not within the scope of this study to evaluate the relative merits of various stock ownership options. APSE and ARCH understand the value that different management arrangements and providers bring as housing suppliers and the role they can play in community development and regeneration. Our contention is however that there should be more of a level playing field between stock and management options, tenants and councils should be able to determine how resources are used to best effect, and that the opportunities and advantages of stock retention should be recognised in terms of management or stock appraisal that are undertaken. We believe this would enable a more objective basis upon which local people, politicians and professionals can judge solutions that are appropriate for local circumstances.

While councils generally have been tasked to improve their strategic housing role this research aims to identify where local authorities can deliver their strategic housing role more effectively as a result of owning and managing their own stock. Where particularly a split in functions has been forced by financial expediency it is our view that the strategic housing function can be more difficult to deliver and there is a risk that housing management services become too distanced from councils as they try to establish themselves as separate entities. Effectively a chase for resources, a failing financial subsidy system and a limited range of stock and management options can force changes in arrangements that might not be for the best in the longer term and are not fully costed or indeed well planned.

In terms of practice, the research examined how stock retention better links into matters such as: homelessness and meeting housing demands and needs, anti-social behaviour, services for elderly and vulnerable people, health and well-being, community engagement, training and employment opportunities, social inclusion, neighbourhood management, planning and regeneration, sustainable procurement and efforts to address climate change. While other social landlords can have exemplary schemes addressing these matters, this report shows how stock retainers can take a comprehensive approach in linking up a range of services and themes which incorporate individual initiatives.

Knowledge and connections that are embedded and informal can tend to be taken for granted in local authorities that own and manage their stock. The research has sought to make this connectivity and the advantages it brings more explicit. This report unpicks the way in which stock retention enables councils to act holistically on a policy and practice level by; placing retained housing within the wider local government policy context; setting out the results of a quantitative survey of stock retainers; presenting detailed case studies; and analysing the key themes of stock retention in meeting wider corporate goals. It then analyses the messages that have emerged and makes recommendations based upon the findings.

Policy context

Section one examines the political environment in which retained housing councils have been operating over the past three decades and shows that tenants and residents have chosen for their council to be their landlord despite more favourable funding opportunities for other options. This section also explores the policy context in which stock retained housing

providers are now operating. It sets out recent policy drivers towards more 'joined up' local government, 'place-shaping' and community leadership, greater emphasis on working in partnership with other agencies and increasing the emphasis of the strategic housing role of councils. Examination of this policy context identifies the benefits of stock retention in meeting broader local objectives, that retention of council housing should be given an equal footing to other stock options and the importance of allowing councils the maximum level of self determination in the use and management of resources and identification of the optimal delivery options.

Survey results

Section two presents the results of quantitative research to examine the benefits of retained housing and qualitative interviews with council tenants to look at their experience in detail and determine their perspective.

The survey was conducted among senior officers in stock retained authorities. While it is unsurprising that those working in the retained housing sector report there to be wider benefits to local government from owning and managing stock the views provided remain valid. The survey was conducted in order to unpick the relationships between retained housing and other policies, services, priorities and partners.

Key findings of the survey were:

- The ownership and management of retained council housing tends to sit within a larger local authority department or directorate. In this case housing management services are seamlessly integrated with other local authority services and functions from an organisational perspective.
- Equally, combined housing functions (strategic, housing options, housing management) ensure that the Council retains housing skills and resources. Effectively there is the quantum of resources available to ensure that housing does not become residualised.
- The links between services both on an informal and formal basis are viewed as stronger and more effective. Priorities can be quickly identified and action can be taken that is swift and decisive. Planning can be easier as officers already meet at all levels of the organisation.
- The consensus was that there were more effective interfaces and profitable working relationships between housing policy and practice. Housing policy worked with housing management services to introduce change and improvement rather than at some points being at odds with front line services.
- Almost half of the stock retainers in the survey carry out work for other services within the council, most commonly repair and maintenance of civic buildings. This again lends itself to natural integration of housing with other services within the authority.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents said that owning and managing stock helped fulfil the council's strategic housing role more effectively. Dealing with homelessness, allocations and sheltered housing schemes are the areas of work, which benefited most from the council having retained its stock.
- Respondents thought owning and managing properties helped to address residents concerns about things that mattered to them and local government's wider objectives. Improved responses to community safety/tackling anti-social behaviour is the area where they believe retaining housing stock had the greatest impact. They ranked the next greatest contribution of retained council housing to other wider objectives as follows; community cohesion, delivering efficiency and value for money, community engagement, improving health and well-being, addressing environmental challenges, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal.
- Respondents believed benefits had ensued from stock retention in terms of delivering other council services, especially because, as a single body, a local authority can share information about residents more easily and securely than a number of different organisations are able to.
- Staff working within a single organisation can liaise more closely when delivering different services to the same individual resident or family.

- Retention of stock was believed to impact upon effectiveness of other services. The survey found it to be most beneficial in; the collection of rents and council tax, tackling fraud, services for elderly and vulnerable people, neighbourhood services and revenues and benefits.
- Respondents believed that stock retention has clear benefits for working in partnership with other agencies, particularly when working with the Police.
- A total of 83% of those who responded said they thought that being a stock retainer helped them relate policy to practice better and to adapt policy and services accordingly when needed.

The tenants' perspective

Key findings of interviews with tenants were:

- Tenants reported that they are on the whole satisfied with the standard of their council accommodation, the service they receive and the neighbourhood in which they live.
- Tenants believed that secure accommodation was a vital factor in family life, health, education and well-being. As one tenant put it: 'A roof over your head is important for everything. You can then build the rest of your life if you have that security.'
- These interviews showed that involvement of council tenants in decisions about their homes was a strong catalyst for engagement in broader local democracy and a stepping-stone for community empowerment and improving local services.
- They saw benefits of stock retention for priorities that went far beyond the properties themselves. Key themes that emerged were the contribution of council housing; as a foundation for all other important aspects of their lives; the role of council housing in community engagement; the improvement of the local environment in their neighbourhood; addressing anti-social behaviour; links to other services; and energy efficiency. Examples of links to specific council services given included: social care, services for young people, sheltered housing, disability, police and health.

Typical comments from tenants included:

- 'Wardens go all over the estate checking on anti-social behaviour. It now looks better and feels safer.'
- 'If any of us have problems - domestic violence or debt and getting benefits we are entitled to - they point us in the right direction and the help is all under one roof.'
- 'If the housing officers know there are vulnerable council tenants, they can point them in the right direction so they can get other services they need.'

Case studies

In section three, we look in detail at examples of ways in which retained housing is delivering holistic benefits in case study authorities.

- The West Lancashire case study is the most detailed and was compiled following a number of days spent with tenants and representatives of external bodies as well as officers in a range of departments at the council. This shows how the holistic approach taken across the 'excellent' rated authority means the housing service also contributes to the delivery of the council's six key corporate priorities. Being a retained stock authority has been especially significant in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour in the borough, with the housing department funding a member of staff in a multi-disciplinary team and a consequential 11% drop in crime between 2007 and 2008.
- The Canterbury case study highlights how owning and managing housing has influenced policies in a way that takes into account the full range of diverse demographics of a city with three universities and an army barracks. It has resulted in a healthy mixture of tenures on estates and has had a positive impact on the wider community as well as council tenants.
- The Carmarthenshire County Council case study demonstrates how involvement of tenants in setting the Carmarthenshire Housing Standard means a comprehensive approach to improving properties and services is yielding wider benefits for local environments, communities and the economy.
- The construction of new council properties in Midlothian is helping meet the authority's vision for social and environmental sustainability and economic

regeneration as well as the need for affordable homes locally.

- In Milton Keynes owning and managing its own housing stock has enabled the council to work with partners and reduce waiting times for people in need of housing; especially young homeless people and young people leaving care.
- The South Derbyshire case study shows how being a stock retained authority is bringing significant advantages in terms of fulfilling the authority's strategic housing role, for which it has received an 'excellent' rating from the Audit Commission.
- The Wandsworth case study provides evidence of how an 'excellent rated' authority owning and managing housing and providing comprehensive housing services has enabled closer working relationships with other services that have led to more effective delivery, for example in; emergency control, highways, arrangements for the safeguarding of children and adults, delivery of additional housing under the 'Hidden Homes' initiative and the rehousing of vulnerable adults, anti-social behaviour, dealing with dangerous dogs and enhancing local democratic engagement.
- In Warwick the authority has used its retained stock status to work effectively in partnership with other agencies such as the Police.

Recommendations

Section four brings together the various stages of research, analyses the themes that have emerged and makes recommendations for further research and policy considerations. APSE and ARCH call for:

- An equal status to be given to stock and management retention by councils as an option to ensure that retained council housing is given appropriate profile and resources to reflect the fact that its tenants and residents have chosen their council as their landlord and remain satisfied with the services they receive –despite inequities in the present legal and financial framework in which stock retainers operate.
- The benefits of stock retention and council housing management have been undervalued by the housing sector. The housing sector should recognise the lessons that can be learnt from the approach to service delivery and joint working that retention of housing stock brings in areas of activity such as tackling crime and anti social behaviour.
- Further research as to the cost effectiveness and benefits of retention of council stock and management allowing assessment of increased effectiveness in delivering the strategic housing role and services including governance arrangements.
- Freedom given to control and use assets to meet a broad range of objectives with councils able to manage their assets without the undue level of regulation that currently applies to build, set rents, support innovative housing offers including rent to buy schemes without getting penalised.
- Progress towards a fairer policy and funding framework in the form of proposed changes to the HRA subsidy system and opportunities for council building, continued and expanded into the next Parliament to allow council housing to once again be an option of choice for all, not a last resort for the few.
- Assessing the holistic benefits of affordable housing options should be undertaken in the form of a wider research project in partnership between ARCH, APSE and other housing bodies to examine robustly the holistic benefits that different housing options can provide.
- Recognition that housing can play a crucial part in helping the national economy out of recession. There should be no quick fix reduction in funding for new affordable housing or for improvement in the Comprehensive Spending Review due this year. The development of affordable housing helped the economy in the last recession and the opportunity should be seized this time around also. Councils can play a crucial role in enabling and in taking forward development and improvement. They must not be sidelined.
- A standard that moves beyond bricks and mortar and covers the wider environment and neighbourhood, such as a 'Homes and Environment Standard' or 'Decent Neighbourhoods Standard'. This would be backed up by sufficient funding and flexibilities, to enable local authorities to approach provision of housing in a much

more holistic fashion to improve local environments, the safety and connectivity of neighbourhoods and to address a broad range of environmental issues including climate change and sustainability.

Conclusion

Throughout this report we provide comments that illustrate the benefits ownership and management of housing can bring to other council services and priorities on a day-to-day basis and at a strategic level. These have, more often than not, previously been taken for granted as it is simply how officers and elected members in local authorities are accustomed to working. This study has sought to make such benefits explicit and present tangible evidence as to the positive ways in which retained council housing can add value to local government and the communities it serves.

This is a first step in mapping hitherto largely uncharted territory. Council management and the retention of council stock must not be treated as a second class option either by Government or by the housing profession. There must be a level playing field between management and stock options. It must be given an equal chance but first and foremost judged on its effectiveness and efficiency. This report also however provides compelling evidence of the additional benefits gained by those councils who have decided to retain stock and management of their housing. It is the conclusion of this report that these additional benefits are not sufficiently considered as part of the stock/management options process, that this process can be far too skewed by options being favoured and promoted both by Government and the professional housing sector and that it will only be through the sector being unencumbered of regulation (financial and asset management) that a level playing field will be created.

1: Policy context

THIS section examines the context in which stock retained authorities are operating at a national and local level in order to map out the links between housing and wider local authority policy and practice. To determine the ways in which stock retention can meet holistic aims, we first look at the way in which attitudes to council housing and policy on stock ownership have changed in the past thirty years. We then discuss the current situation in relation to: the way housing relates to wider strategies; the way retained housing relates to the strategic housing role; and the implications of recent developments on housing finance reform and house-building for stock retainers.

Background

There has been a dramatic shift away from councils being principal providers of affordable homes over the past thirty years. In the 1950s, political parties competed to deliver the largest number of council homes. In 1979, around a third of the British population lived in local authority owned properties and council housing was a mainstream option of choice for working families. But by 2006, only 12% of people were living in homes provided by their local authority (Hanley, 2006). In the intervening period, council housing lost political favour, has been starved of resources and has come to be perceived as a stigmatised last resort for those with no other options.

The tide turned against council housing from the late-1970s onwards with large-scale transfer of stock to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). In 1981 the number of properties rented from local authorities in England was 4,798,000, compared with 410,000 rented from RSLs. Ten years later, 3,899,000 were rented from local authorities and 608,000 from RSLs (CLG table 104, Dwelling stock by tenure: England). In Scotland, the number of publicly rented properties was 755,000 in 1993, with 67,000 rented from housing associations, but this had more than halved by 2008, with 330,000 homes publicly rented and 269,000 rented from housing associations (See appendix 2).

The political push towards local authorities divesting themselves of their stock continued until recently. There are some differences between council housing policy in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We will examine the situation in England before that in the rest of the UK on page 14.

England

In April 2000, the Government decided that social housing in England should be brought up to Decent Homes standards by 2010 to address a £19bn repairs backlog. The Green Paper *Quality and Choice: A decent Home for All* identified four alternative ways of doing so. Options appraisals had to be undertaken and tenants' views sought, with ballots to determine who should own and manage their homes (HMSO, April 2000). One of the following models had to be chosen with the Paper noting the first three as the main approaches to be pursued:

- Private Finance Initiative (PFI) models
- Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) of properties to an RSL
- Creation of an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO)
- Stock retention by the local authority landlord

PFI

In Decent Homes PFI schemes, the local authority contracts a consortium of private sector firms to carry out initial capital works and ongoing management and maintenance for a selection of its housing stock. The local authority retains both its tenants and ownership of the stock. PFI proved a complex process however (APSE 2003). While a total of 22 Decent Homes (Housing Revenue Account) schemes are in place, these are not a whole stock option and cover only specific schemes in specific areas.

LSVT

LSVT has resulted in 1.3m council homes across the UK being transferred to housing association ownership between 1988 and 2008 – 75% of these since 1997 (JRF, February 2009). Between 1988 and 1999, 320,000 properties in England were transferred. By 2007, 1,987,000 homes in England were rented from councils and 1,886,000 from RSLs (CLG table 104, Dwelling stock by tenure: England). In Scotland 13% of housing stock is now publicly owned and 11% is owned by RSLs following transfer programmes (see Appendix 2).

ALMOs

The ALMO option enabled additional borrowing and a status separate from the authority as well as access to funding unavailable to stock retainers. It enabled councils demonstrating two stars under Best Value inspection, sound financial planning and a clear plan for the establishment of an arms length body to take over the management but not the ownership of its housing. This allows for increased borrowing, funded through additional HRA subsidy at an average of £500 per dwelling, to facilitate around £5,000 extra borrowing in addition to Major Repairs Allowance (MRA). There are now 69 ALMOs in England, which manage some one million council homes across sixty-five local authorities.

Stock retention

The stock retention option did not bring with it any additional borrowing. MRA was available to keep up with repairs but not tackle the backlog. It was made clear that additional capital would only become available to those councils that adopted one of the other options. Central government would not relax Treasury rules and introduce General Government Financial Deficit in place of the Public Sector Net Cash Requirement, which would have allowed stock retained authorities to borrow against their assets outside of the national balance sheet (APSE 2000). But despite the political and financial odds that were stacked against stock retention, tenants in many areas wished to remain with the council as their landlord. There are now 105 English stock retained councils, which between them own and manage some 815,000 properties (see Appendix).

Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

In Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive took over the housing responsibilities of 65 separate organisations and became Northern Ireland's overall housing authority following the Housing Executive Act 1971. Councils do not have housing stock ownership or management responsibilities.

In Scotland social landlords have until 2015 to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and recent legislation has proposed: that Right to Buy be removed for new tenants; a modernised and streamlined regulatory system; and a social housing charter. Transfer has been the only alternative for accessing extra resources as there has been no ALMO route. Statistics from the Scottish Household Survey for March 2008 show that of a total of 2.451 million dwellings, 1.535 million (63%) were owner-occupied, 234,000 (9%) were privately rented, 83,000 (3%) were vacant or second homes, 269,000 (11%) were housing association properties and 350,000 (13%) were local authority properties. This compares with 63% privately owned in 2000, 7% privately rented, 6% housing association and 24% local authority and 55.5% owner occupied, 7% privately rented, 3% housing associations and 34% local authority in 1993 (Scottish Housing table Estimated stock of dwellings by tenure: 1993 to 2008).

In Wales, social landlords are obliged to bring their housing to a decent standard by 2012. Again, the ALMO option is not available. Of the 22 councils in Wales, as at July 2009:

- 4 had their retention strategy under scrutiny by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) or no firm proposals
- 4 had their retention strategy accepted by WAG
- 2 were at options appraisal stage
- 2 were pursuing transfer
- 10 had transferred stock or were in the process of doing so

Local housing solutions

Who should own and manage council housing has been a contentious issue. It was argued that the transfer process has become an instrument of central government policy delivery rather than allowing local areas to determine the best local solutions to housing needs (Malpass and Mullins 2002). APSE's report *The future for social housing in the UK* provided in-depth analysis of the various methods of funding available to local authorities when assessing their housing objectives. It concluded that: the value for money of PFI had yet to be proved; LSVT is not universally popular amongst tenants; and transfer can lead to 'fragmentation' and impact on other council activity. It found stock retention can offer: democratic accountability, flexibility, standard setting, equality of opportunity, and 'continuing ability to deliver direct services and not just in areas directly related to housing'. It noted that stock retention was a more viable option in Scotland and a more mixed economy of provision with bespoke options for individual authorities was possible (APSE, 2003). The National Audit Office report *Improving Social Housing Through Stock Transfer* also cast doubt on whether LSVT offers value for money for the taxpayer (NAO March 2003). Some academics and activists characterised transfer of housing stock as 'privatisation' of public assets (Mooney and Poole 2005, Glynn 2007). Others argued that ballots offered a 'loaded choice' and real tenant choice is restricted because funding is not available for those who vote against transfer (Zitron 2004, Ginsburg 2005).

In the broader property context, transfer to RSLs has been accompanied by sales of council homes to owner-occupiers under Right to Buy and there has been a marked social shift nationally in favour of becoming home-owners. Owner occupation rose from 10,653,000 in 1981 to 15,449,000 in 2007, the number of overall properties increased and the number of privately rented properties changed from 2,051,000 in 1981 to 2,866,000 in 2007 (CLG table 104, Dwelling stock by tenure: England).

A recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation study argues that a second wave of stock transfers since 1997 has had a positive impact. The authors note: 'Guidance has required authorities' transfer plans to demonstrate how regeneration benefits can be maximised' and transfer initiatives have linked in with community regeneration projects. However, the report also quantifies the amount of funding that has been available for RSLs since transfer of council housing to achieve such benefits: 'Since 1988, promises on property repairs and modernisation have been facilitations by funding totalling £24bn in England alone – including nearly £5bn public funding' (JRF, 2009).

Such funding has not been available to stock retained authorities. This means the strength of support among tenants for their council to remain their landlord persists despite financial incentives via LSVT and ALMOs to help pay for improvements to their homes. APSE has campaigned for all affordable housing providers to be placed on the same financial footing to enable true tenants' choice to be possible. ARCH was set up in 2006 to provide a collective voice for stock retained councils and fight for a fairer deal for their residents. As Trowers & Hamlin's lawyers pointed out at the time: 'The creation of ARCH is a clear signal that there will be continued pressure on government to provide additional opportunities (even if not significant resources) outside the LSVT, ALMO and PFI options' (TH June 2006). APSE and ARCH have argued that the current system is unsustainable. A particular issue, upon which the Local Government Association has also campaigned, is lack of control over local housing finance under the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy system and the fact that council rents are siphoned off into a national pot, which is more than £200m in surplus and is not necessarily used for housing purposes (LGA July 2009).

Performance and tenant services standards

While this report examines the additional benefits retained council housing can bring to other local government priorities, these must be delivered in addition to the primary function of retained council housing, which is to provide and manage affordable social housing. Latest data from APSE's performance networks, the largest voluntary benchmarking system for councils in the UK, shows there has been improvement among retained stock councils on basic indicators for day to day service between 2004/5 and 2008/9, such as the following:

Indicator no and criteria	2008-09	2004-05
PI 01b - Percentage of appointments kept	97.83%	96.81%
PI 04 - Gas servicing (financial year)	97.54%	96.03%
PI 10 - Average value of work per operational full time employee i.e. productivity	£60,058	£58,889
PI 14c - Percentage of voids completed on time	91.66%	77.95%
PI 20a - Average re-let times (days)	33	56
PI 24 - Average time taken to complete a routine repair (days)	13	18
PI 36 - Percentage of non emergency jobs not subject to call back or complaint	99.52%	99.38%

The housing function within local authorities is not only subject to the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Area Assessment performance framework, but also contributes to a range of other local functions and priorities against which councils are assessed (Warburton2008).

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) statutory consultation on a new regulatory framework for social housing in England set out the six standards against which landlord performance will be assessed from 1 April 2010 (TSA 2010). ARCH obviously supports measures to provide the best possible services for tenants and residents, but in its formal response to the consultation, pointed out that stock retainers already have significant measures in place in relation to performance, neighbourhood management and local area co-operation activities and tenant involvement and empowerment (ARCH February 2010).

ARCH commented that proposed standards on neighbourhood management and local area co-operation are reasonable but has urged the TSA to acknowledge that local authority housing management services will already be co-operating with local strategic partnerships and if they are not this will be picked up in the LAA or CAA assessments. The TSA does not need to separately monitor this area for local authorities outside these existing regulatory processes, according to ARCH.

In regard to tenant involvement and empowerment, the consultation response comments: 'ARCH members have been undertaking this for nearly 40 years and completely support the objective of involving and empowering residents to the level of their choice. The new regulatory framework should not duplicate measures that are already in place and should be in conformity with the objectives of the local performance framework'

Reflecting upon the background in which stock retainers have been operating is a useful start in examining the holistic benefits they can deliver. For one thing, it demonstrates that achievements in the sector have often occurred despite a difficult financial framework. For another, it shows that councils have been unable to reach their full potential because they have been hampered by the unfavourable context in which they have been operating. Signs of a more positive political attitude towards retained council housing, as witnessed with proposals for a more sustainable finance system and council house-building opportunities will be discussed below.

The relationship between retained housing and wider local government strategies

In recent years there has been a growing momentum towards a more 'joined-up' approach to local government that moves away from departmental silos and considers priorities, services and budgets as a more strategic whole. A joined-up agenda allows: alignment of strategies; a common vision; improved information sharing; and alignment of funding.

Services beyond silos

The following are just some of the local government responsibilities that can benefit from a joined-up approach with housing:

Training and employment *Care for elderly and vulnerable residents*
Economic development *Streetscene* *Homelessness*
Transport *Social inclusion* *Anti-social behaviour* *Regeneration*
Health and well being *Planning* *Environmental health*
Neighbourhood management *Community development and cohesion*

Achievements in the sector have often occurred despite a difficult financial framework

Strong and prosperous communities

The Government's 2006 White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* had a number of themes running through it, which can all be influenced by provision of affordable, decent quality housing in sustainable communities and demand a more holistic approach to strategies and services:

- Giving citizens a bigger say in decisions – council tenants have a direct influence on how their services are managed and provided and councils are experienced in ensuring tenant engagement is effective as part of the democratic process.
- Effective, accountable and responsive local government – both the housing management function and repairs and maintenance functions have changed radically in recent years. Initiatives such as choice-based lettings, improved repairs appointments systems, enhanced scrutiny arrangements, multiskilling amongst front line employees, better partnership working between organisations and schemes such as alleygating and estate wardens are all examples of how council housing has become more effective, accountable and responsive.
- Local government as place-shaper – councils that have retained their housing stock and have both the strategic and delivery role are in an ideal place to lead their communities as they are able to listen to service users and deliver a responsive service without barriers which may exist between different organisations
- A new performance framework – councils are the most appropriately placed body to monitor and report on the performance of public services in their areas. Councils have embraced a culture of performance management in a way which some of their partners have yet to accept. Stock retainers are able to provide performance data on their housing service such as repairs and maintenance – which is of key importance to tenants.
- Community cohesion – councils have the ability via lettings and allocations policies and support to specific groups (such as emergency asylum seekers) to ensure communities are mixed and sustainable. Councils provide support to enable those who are unable to access private housing to play a full part in the local community.
- Deprivation and poverty – housing has a vital impact in terms of health, educational attainment, income and employability. The affordability and security found in council tenure help to address poverty and some of the issues that accompany it.
- Partnership working – There is a duty for councils and named partners to have regard to targets in the Local Area Agreement and a duty to co-operate (see below). Councils with housing stock are included but housing associations and RSLs are not. Data sharing is seen as vital for partnership working but this is difficult between different agencies due to technical and cultural reasons.

Local Area Agreements and Multi-Area Agreements

The delivery plan for local authorities' Sustainable Community Strategies requires that county and unitary authorities, together with local partners, prepare Local Area Agreements (LAAs) in agreement between central government and relevant organisations from a local area. This involves negotiating 35 targets with central government and partners from the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The Chartered Institute of Housing notes that in the first tranche of LAAs, housing was recognised as an essential element in place-shaping and achieving other social outcomes (CIH, 2007). There was a wide range of housing outcomes within LAAs, the main ones being: better quality and improved access to housing for older people; reducing homelessness generally, and specifically for young people; and increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs), which expand the concept across a sub-region, are also being adopted on a voluntary basis.

Place-shaping

Sir Michael Lyons' 2007 report on the future of local government discussed the importance of its 'place-shaping' role in providing safe, secure places to live, helping foster prosperity and sustainability and engagement of citizens. The connections between services such as planning, transport, skills, housing, adult social care; domestic waste collection; community

safety; health and well-being children's services, community leadership and frontline services were recognised. He argued that: 'Looking at housing issues in a strategic context is an essential part of the place-shaping role of local authorities' and 'real achievements cannot be made without local authorities focusing on place' (Lyons 2007, p.14, p.19).

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enshrines the place-shaping role and includes a statutory duty for local councils and other local service providers to co-operate and strengthens the 'place shaper' role for local councils.

Public realm and environment

The Calcutt Review noted that developers, 'generally seek to minimise the amount invested in the public realm such as open spaces accessible to the general public and maintained by the local authority' (Calcutt, November 2007). In most standard estate developments, extensive high quality investment in the public realm is not considered cost effective and developers usually seek to negotiate down from the minimum requirements of the local planning authority'. By contrast, councils' corporate plans often have a series of objectives specifically designed to ensure these wider issues are addressed when they exercise their powers. Although they are under pressure to ensure value for money, councils have a series of other drivers, as discussed above, which encourage them to maximise benefits which other providers feel unable to.

Beyond Decent Homes towards 'Decent Neighbourhoods'

As outlined previously, councils were given options for meeting targets to tackle housing repairs backlogs and some models enabled better access to finance in order to do so. The National Audit Office reported that as at April 2009, 86% of homes in the social sector were classed as decent and the Decent Homes programme had brought wider benefits such as improved housing management, tenant involvement and employment opportunities. It cited factors contributing to failure to meet the standard, principally budgets and bureaucracy. NAO forecast that 92% of social housing would meet the standard by the 2010 deadline with the remainder not expected to be finished until 2018. It forecast that 13.2% of ALMO properties, 10% of retained council stock and 6.6 of that transferred to RSLs would not reach the standard by the 2010 deadline (NAO 2010). The latest House of Commons Public Accounts Committee publication on The Decent Homes Programme reports that ALMOs 'have spent more on improvements per property than local authorities that retained their stock' and recommends the Homes and Communities Agency find out why (PAC 2010 p.5). It points out that funding was only provided to ALMOs and PFI options and while local authorities had to fund improvements from their own resources (PAC 2010 p.6).^o

APSE has long advocated for a more equitable financial regime to enable all social landlords to provide Decent Homes regardless of the management model chosen locally. It has also developed a Decent Neighbourhoods Standard, which moves beyond the Decent Homes standard and takes into account the wider environment in which council housing is situated. This acknowledges that housing is only one element in a decent area and that other factors are important in improving quality of life. This would provide an opportunity to mainstream environmental and sustainability agendas. Authorities that own and manage their own properties are well-placed to take this approach forward.

A Decent Neighbourhood Standard should address the following:

Energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty

Health and safety issues to reduce accidents

Reduced litter and graffiti Lighting

Climate change and CO2 emissions

Alternative or new power sources (mini wind turbines, combined heat & power production)

Improvements in communal facilities in shared areas such as lifts, security access and safety features

Investing in community development such as paying for communal facilities, funding individuals on estates to co-ordinate activities and free training sessions

The standard should be developed alongside existing regeneration schemes both in terms of physical and social regeneration and financial planning. It should be incorporated into developments in other policy areas such as community cohesion, crime and disorder reduction, the Respect agenda and neighbourhood empowerment

Housing supply

The Hills Review notes that social housing will have a role to play in the foreseeable future due to the problems with supply and increasing demand for affordable homes (Hills, 2007). It says that action needed includes 'encouraging the positive role local authorities can play as providers of affordable, secure social housing in order to meet the demand'. Latest figures for homelessness total some 1,890,000 across the UK, broken down as follows: 1,763,140 in England 91,000 (Shelter 2010) 56,609 in Scotland 18,076 (Scotland Shelter 2010) Wales (Shelter Cymru), and 18,067 Northern Ireland (NIHE 2010).

The Hills review notes four issues which policy should address in coming years:

- increasing the level of attention given to the existing stock and tenant population
- supporting housing options for mixed-incomes within existing communities
- supporting livelihoods, encouraging those who provide support to tenants to do so more holistically
- a more varied menu for both prospective and existing tenants e.g. low cost home ownership rather than a traditional tenancy for those with ability to take that option.

Councils that have retained their stock have shown they are capable of addressing all these issues through initiatives such as block renewal and improvement schemes, working with builders to ensure mixed tenure developments and support for schemes such as local housing companies and partnership working as part of their strategic housing responsibilities.

The all-party House of Commons Council Housing Group points out that councils also have an advantage in terms of delivering new homes because 'all the key tasks are located under one roof', including land searches, planning permission, and legal services; and because councils are responsible for addressing homelessness and managing housing waiting lists they can assure the correct type of properties are being provided (HOCCHG, April 2009 p. 8). This is now being realised through opportunities to build new homes for the first time in decades, as discussed below.

Social inclusion, community leadership and citizen involvement

The fact that tenants of social housing are on average more likely to be elderly, unemployed, disabled, single or lone parents or from an ethnic minority is also noted in the Hills report (Hills 2007). These groups are the most commonly in receipt of council services or services administered by the council, such as Housing Benefit. It is more convenient and cost effective to have all services they receive delivered by a single provider from a single point and the move to one-stop shops and neighbourhood offices has resulted in more effective provision. The factors leading to area polarisation can be also addressed by local authorities by investment in leisure and play facilities, street scene services, highways improvements as well as grants to local groups to encourage community development and involvement.

Tenant involvement is fundamental to the democratic process and direct democratic accountability sets councils apart from other housing providers. Tenants are able to have a direct impact on the decision-making process to make sure that services are relevant to the needs of residents across the whole community. Councils have a detailed knowledge of their community as no other organisations do through both officers and councillors and the breadth of services they are responsible for.

As providers of services which impact upon all aspects of people's lives and which inter-relate, councillors and officers are not limited by a 'housing only' perspective. The place-shaping and leadership roles of the council ensure that they are able to get things done in a way that is inclusive for all residents. Councils provide housing services alongside a range of other services that help to improve lives such as training schemes, community, leisure and play facilities, debt advice and social care and connections with such services are more easily made when within a single organisation.

Tenants are able to have a direct impact on the decision-making process to make sure that services are relevant to the needs of residents across the whole community

Local economies, jobs and skills

The Leitch Review placed renewed emphasis on apprenticeships whilst noting the valuable part they play in the skills agenda (Leitch 2006). Councils have been successful in providing apprenticeship schemes for local young people over many years and have concentrated in trades such as plumbing, electrics, carpentry, plastering and bricklaying. The 2007 Housing Green Paper *Homes for the future; more affordable more sustainable*, set out a new target for housing supply to support economic development.

In economic terms, the construction industry is significant to the local economy and has a high 'economic multiplier' effect. Decisions about the sourcing of labour, training and supply chains are all relevant and important to local economic strategies. APSE's research project in 2007 demonstrated the value that public employment brings to local economies through high quality jobs and training opportunities (APSE 2007). This was followed up by a study that mapped the 'local economic footprint of public services'. This study used an economic multiplier model to demonstrate that council expenditure on direct employment, effective procurement and local supply chains can mean £1 of public money generates £1.64 in the local economy (APSE/CLES 2008).

The CIH publication *Housing and the Economy - Integrated Strategies* also shows that housing is a vital part of the economy and local government's strategic housing role is vital to a whole host of other related local issues. CIH's discussion explores the links between better housing and a better economy, in terms of place-shaping, labour markets, construction and design: 'Areas of connectivity between housing and economy' must be explored and 'encourage more sophisticated thinking about how they do or could relate at the regional and local level' (Davies 2008, p. 9). Transforming estates, a research report by ECOTEC, highlights that environmental improvements alone may not be enough to regenerate areas unless there is a co-ordinated approach to improving access to jobs, boosting residents' skills and tackling health inequalities (Thornhill 2009).

Thus retained council housing is operating in a context of ever-increasing connectivity between a range of policies and services for which local government is responsible. This means that the advantages owning and managing stock can bring all the areas described above is of increasing relevance.

Retained housing and local government's strategic housing role

The strategic housing role has grown increasingly important to local and national government. In 2005, the CIH and LGA advocated for a renaissance of the local authority's strategic housing role, to help deliver across a range of PSA targets and to achieve better value for money (CIH/LGA 2005). APSE's paper on strategic housing said: 'A new vision is needed for strategic leadership in relation to housing and sustainable communities. It is vital that those working in the strategic housing role should seek to influence all agencies involved in the built environment, infrastructure, housing, and homelessness and care and support, as well as social exclusion, regeneration and community well-being work.' (APSE May 2006, p. 2).

The Homes and Communities Agency's 'Single Conversation' approach to allocating funding on a place basis necessitates a well-developed strategic housing function. The Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration provides further impetus for integrating economic development, housing, regeneration and planning to support economic growth and build sustainable communities (CLG and BERR 2008).

The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) for local government has been running a strategic housing programme to develop knowledge and skills on effective strategic approaches. In 2007, the IDeA commissioned CIH and Ipsos MORI to determine the extent of skills, knowledge and capacity in local authorities to deliver the strategic housing function effectively. The report of results *Success through skills: maintaining proficiency in strategic housing* contains insight into the strategic housing role, but does not differentiate between stock options (CIH 2007a).

The survey was followed up a year later and found there was greater understanding and delivery of the strategic housing function and more engagement with the place-shaping agenda. Understanding of delivery of affordable housing and building mixed and sustainable communities was growing. Partnership working had improved. Strategic officers felt

housing strategies work well for older and disabled people but less in meeting the needs of groups including BME communities, it concluded. A majority of 96% said housing was a key corporate priority. Housing issues have a higher profile and a role in Sustainable Communities Strategies and are more integrated in key partnership and service delivery vehicles such as LSPs, according to the survey. It said: 'Working relationships with internal partners (i.e. local authority departments) have improved across the board since the baseline survey'. It suggests that housing is now perceived as 'an important cross-cutting issue' and driver that can help deliver on other targets (CIH 2008, p.15, p.19).

CLG guidance on the strategic housing role sets out the following activities and functions which local authorities should address (CLG September 2008). These are:

- assess and plan for housing need across all tenures
- make best use of existing stock to meet need, through greater local discretion in access and lettings of social housing stock to make it more mixed in terms of type, size, affordability and tenure
- plan for and facilitate new housing supply
- plan and commission housing support services which link homes and housing support services
- ensure effective housing and neighbourhood management through partnership working
- maximise the use of existing stock in the social and private rented sectors
- estate transformation and creating mixed communities in both new and existing communities
- joining up services to support sustainable communities (e.g. schools, PCTs and social services, etc)
- develop policies to link social tenants to employment and skills

There is significant potential for all of these strategic housing functions and activities to be more effectively addressed through the ownership and management of retained council housing to best effect locally

There is significant potential for all of these strategic housing functions and activities to be more effectively addressed through using the ownership and management of retained council housing to best effect locally. Despite this, the relationship between strategic housing and stock retention has not received attention. It is logical to suggest that having control over stock can only be a benefit in terms of addressing homelessness, providing information on local housing needs and other strategic housing duties. This assumption was tested out in the survey and case studies undertaken during this research and the results are reported in sections that follow.

The Audit Commission published an update to Key Lines Of Enquiry assessment criteria on the strategic approach to housing in January 2010 to assess how well a council works with its partners and other stakeholders to address the housing needs and challenges within its area as of April 2010 (Audit Commission, January 2010). Analysis of 42 Local Authority Housing Strategy Inspections carried out by the Audit Commission between July 2007 and October 2009 reveals that stock retainers are the strongest performers in this strategic role. The three authorities rated 'excellent' were stock retainers and three of the six rated 'good' owned and managed their own housing, while only one of the fifteen authorities ranked in the bottom three 'poor' categories were stock retainers (Audit Commission inspection information).

A more positive era for retained council housing

While, as discussed previously, retained council housing was not favoured politically for many years and received less financial resources than other housing management options, there have been encouraging signs of late of a recognition of its place in meeting economic challenges as well as housing needs. This change in attitude among policy-makers has been witnessed in the areas of house-building opportunities and housing finance reform, both of which have the potential to enhance the holistic benefits of stock retention.

House-building

Demand for social housing has been rising dramatically for a number of years and in May 2008 the LGA predicted an increase from 4 million people on council house waiting lists to 5 million by mid 2010. This is a result of people living longer, increased rates of divorce and family breakup and increased housing prices meaning more people are unable to enter the

The recession has added weight to the case made by for councils to build new houses as a way of providing both affordable homes and jobs

housing market. This trend puts enormous pressure on councils (and other organisations providing housing) and the call to give councils the resources to build houses again re emerged.

The recession has added weight to the case made by for councils to build new houses as a way of providing both affordable homes and jobs for architects, surveyors, tradespeople and all those companies that depend on the construction industry. This is especially true at a time when both private sector builders are unable to build the required number of houses and housing associations are facing financial difficulties.

Prime minister Gordon Brown paved the way for new local authority properties in February 2008 when he pledged to address barriers preventing councils building (Sherman 2009). The councils that gathered at the House of Commons for a panel discussion organised by APSE and ARCH in March 2009 made a clear case for a level playing field with other housing providers to enable them to build. They argued that councils have land ready for development, good credit ratings, are democratically accountable and ideally placed to link building with wider social, economic and environmental goals (APSE/ARCH, March 2009). At that point there remained a number of barriers to council building – primarily obstacles thrown up by the HRA regime, inability to access Social Housing Grant or keep receipts from Right to Buy sales – which ministers expressed willingness to address.

Housing Minister, John Healey gave the go-ahead in September 2009 for 47 councils – that applied to the first round of the Homes and Communities Agency Local Authority New Build (LANB) programme – followed by 73 successful bids for second round funding in January 2010 to build a total of some 2,000 new council homes. Only councils could apply for this fund and, in areas where ALMOs manage existing stock, funding applications have had to be made by the authority directly rather than the ALMO. The successful LANB schemes will share almost £250million of Government funding to help build new sustainable homes, which will be matched by prudential borrowing. Construction began on the first sites in England at the end of 2009. The availability of prudential borrowing in Scotland has enabled a more favourable climate for building and the initial allocation of £16.9m is funding construction of some 1,000 homes as a start to a building programme in 14 local authorities in Scotland.

As housing has risen up the political agenda, there has been a rapid escalation in recognition of the role councils can play in both addressing housing needs and also boosting the construction industry and hence local and national economy. The LGA has stated that councils would be able to contribute 139,000 new homes over the next decade if the proposals outlined in the consultation on HRA reform are implemented (LGA, June 2009, Booth, July 2009).

APSE's report for UNISON in November 2009 showed that there was a healthy appetite among councils to build new homes (Unison 2009). *A New Generation of Council Housing: An analysis of need, opportunity, vision and skills* examined how councils are responding to recent opportunities to build homes for the first time in decades and provides detailed case studies of trailblazer councils across the country that are leading the way, such as Broxtowe, Exeter, Greenwich and Midlothian. Recent opportunities for council building in the form of the LANB programme and the Scottish government's programme are providing welcome resources. It shows that councils are well placed to be building in much more significant volume. They are democratically accountable, have land available, are familiar with planning policies, are credit worthy and can deliver new homes in a way that meets a range of holistic community needs and aspirations.

The report's recommendations include:

- Remaining legal and financial barriers should be tackled.
- The reversal of policy in allowing local authorities to become significant housing providers once again should allow council housing to grow to become a quality affordable option for all, not just a safety net for some. A sustainable long-term approach to a new generation of council housing is required, with adequate ongoing funding rather than a 'quick fix' approach.
- The economic benefits of a new generation of council housing, such as using Community Benefits Clauses to maximise economic benefits and training opportunities, should be fully explored.

Nicola Sturgeon, Deputy First Minister for Scotland, has promised that funding for new council homes in Scotland will be doubled to £50m to help build 2,000 new houses and support 3,000 construction industry jobs (BBC April 2009) and that the Scottish government is planning to end the right to buy council homes (Cochrane 2010). In a speech in December 2009, housing minister John Healey said it is time to move on from the national emphasis on home ownership and that in future there will need to be more opportunities for renting, 'new choices in tenure' and greater flexibility to move between types of tenure (Fabian Society 2009).

As well as favourable moves by the current Government, Conservative politicians have also expressed a commitment to council housing. In the Conservative Party's Green Paper on housing, shadow housing minister Grant Shapps said: 'We need to kick our addiction to house price volatility and concentrate on making sure we build enough homes so that every community can meet its housing needs' (Conservative Party, April 2009). The Liberal Democrat Party backed measures to build 1.3m new social homes at its 2008 conference and has recently pledged grants to bring empty homes into use as part of its election manifesto economic stimulus package (www.liberaldemocrats.org.uk).

HRA reform

Following many years of authorities and their representative bodies lobbying for a fairer, more transparent and sustainable housing finance system, the Government launched a consultation in July 2009, which proposes a devolved self-financing alternative and that the new system would:

- Remove the need for the national redistribution mechanism
- Do away with the annual round of determination and allow councils to develop long term business plans for funding their housing, similar to that currently operated by other social housing providers
- Allow councils to keep their rents to invest locally
- Increase councils' ability to respond to local needs
- Councils will be able to access and apply for Social Housing Grant (SHG)
- End of pooling for all capital receipts and enable them to manage directly and fund their own debt
- Allow them to retain 100% of any new build Right to Buy sales receipts.

The price councils are asked to pay as part of the HRA review is to take on an allocation of notional housing debt (Reilly, October 2009). APSE and ARCH, along with other stakeholders, submitted detailed responses to the consultation for the October deadline.

It is hoped that these moves will place stock retainers on a more level financial playing field with other affordable housing providers. Doing so would mean that local solutions to housing questions could be determined on a more objective, and therefore more effective, basis.

Having examined the background, context in which stock retained authorities are operating and recent positive policy developments in this section, we will now look at how this is manifesting on the ground in local authorities. The next section outlines the results of a survey undertaken to determine the extent to which council ownership and management of housing has holistic benefits at both policy and service delivery level and tenants' perspective on the holistic benefits of council housing.

Following many years of authorities and their representative bodies lobbying for a fairer, more transparent and sustainable housing finance system, the Government launched a consultation in July 2009, which proposes a devolved self-financing alternative

Staff working within the same organisation can liaise more effectively when delivering different services to the same individual

2: Results

HAVING established the policy context in which retained stock authorities are operating, this section presents the results of research among stock retainers. The questions for the research were developed following a literature and policy review, which helped establish a hypothesis to be tested out quantitatively via a series of questions.

The survey was circulated via email to stock retaining authorities that are members of APSE and ARCH over summer and autumn 2009. The survey questions addressed the size and structure of the organisation, how retaining the stock has helped councils meet housing objectives, strategic priorities and operational aims. The questions also looked at how different functions within authorities link with retained council housing services. 47 different individuals responded to the survey from 42 different councils. This equates to approximately 40% of all stock retainers.

One of the aims of the survey was to collect the views of operational managers who are working in the context of day-to-day housing service delivery. The survey responses reflect their views which have developed over many years of practice, dealing with many thousands of properties and their tenants, leaseholders and service users; this is an informed and experienced sample of respondents. The nature of the housing function is such that those responding to the survey are used to working with colleagues from a range of other services both within, and external to, the council. These are exactly the right people to listen to when researching the wider impacts of stock retention.

As such the views expressed here are a valid input to the debate on the benefits to be gained from retaining the housing stock within direct council control and their views should be accepted as a significant contribution to the discussion. They are all working in stock retaining councils and, as members of APSE and ARCH, are likely to be committed to the principle of local authority ownership and management of council homes. It is therefore recognised that they will be answering the questions from that perspective. Their views are backed up with examples of practical benefits that exist in their authorities.

Overall the feeling amongst officers within the stock retained sector reflected by this survey is that there are substantial benefits to be gained from retaining the housing stock, as explored in detail below.

Stock size, political control and structure

One of the questions in the survey asked whether the housing department was based in a larger directorate within the council. Only eight councils, of those who responded, operate with a distinct housing department. The remainder, 34 are part of a larger directorate. This demonstrates that retained council housing is structurally linked with other council functions.

Within the larger directorates, there are a wide range of other functions. The services, which are most frequently in the same directorate as housing, are direct services (repairs and maintenance), environmental services (street cleansing and waste collection), leisure and culture and environmental health. Other services found less frequently in the same directorate are planning, adult/social services, revenues and benefits, community safety, community engagement and customer services. The size of the directorates varies with some having a large number of services (and so managing large budgets and resources) whilst others have only one or two extra services as well as housing.

A question was asked about whether the operational services function for housing provides other services within the council (such as civic building maintenance or cleansing services). There was an approximate 50/50 split with half providing only repairs/maintenance and capital works for housing. Of the other half, most carry out a repairs and maintenance service for council owned and civic buildings.

Decent Homes

The survey included a question about the Decent Homes Standard. Of the 42 councils, seven had already completed all work to reach the standard by the end of 2009. A total of 24 of the

councils expected to finish the work in 2010 and so will reach the original target date. A further two councils expected to complete the work in 2011 and one more expects to do so in each year from 2012 to 2015. One council expects to have all work completed sometime after 2015. Four councils did not respond to the question.

This contextual data highlights the varied nature of the councils who responded to the survey. They are operating under different political control, with widely differing stock and tenant and leaseholder numbers, differing organisational structures and progress regarding Decent Homes Standard. There are a range of other factors which will differentiate them from one another such as stock type, deprivation levels among tenants and leaseholders, demand for properties and scale of the council.

On-line survey methodology

Some of the questions include a rating element where respondents are asked to give a score between 1 and 5 (where 1 equates to no help and 5 equates to significant help) reflecting the contribution that stock retention has made to meeting functions, objectives, service provision and partnerships.

Ratings are combined to give average scores, which are shown in the tables provided. Although this is not an exact science, we have assumed that a rating of more than 2.5 reflects a positive contribution as a result of stock retention. A rating of over 4 for example shows stock retention is a significant contributor to meeting functions, objectives, providing services and partnership working. The ratings were gained by combining the scores of all responses.

Links between retained council housing and strategic housing objectives

An overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) agreed that retaining the council housing stock has helped the authority to fulfil its strategic housing role.

The main functions of the strategic housing role were identified and the respondents were asked how they felt retaining the housing stock had helped the council to meet those functions and objectives.

Dealing with homelessness, allocations and sheltered housing schemes are the areas of work which benefited most from the council having retained its stock. These all scored more than 4 in the ratings. The remainder of the functions identified (with the exception of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) scored between 3 and 4.

Key finding

Overall this reflects a feeling that there are substantial benefits to be gained when managing strategic housing issues in conjunction with stock retention. Dealing with homelessness and allocations are areas where retaining the stock has had the largest impact.



Comments from survey respondents

“The local authority is the largest supplier of affordable housing in the district and can therefore influence service provision and rents significantly”.

“Strategy to tackle and prevent homelessness with Education, Social Work and Health (sections). Setting of affordable rents and ability to prudentially borrow to build 1000 council houses”. (Scottish Council)

“ We have been able to improve “asset management of land holdings”. (Welsh Council)

Links between retained council housing and meeting wider council objectives

When asked about the benefit that stock retention has brought to addressing the council’s strategic priorities, the majority of respondents found that benefits did exist.

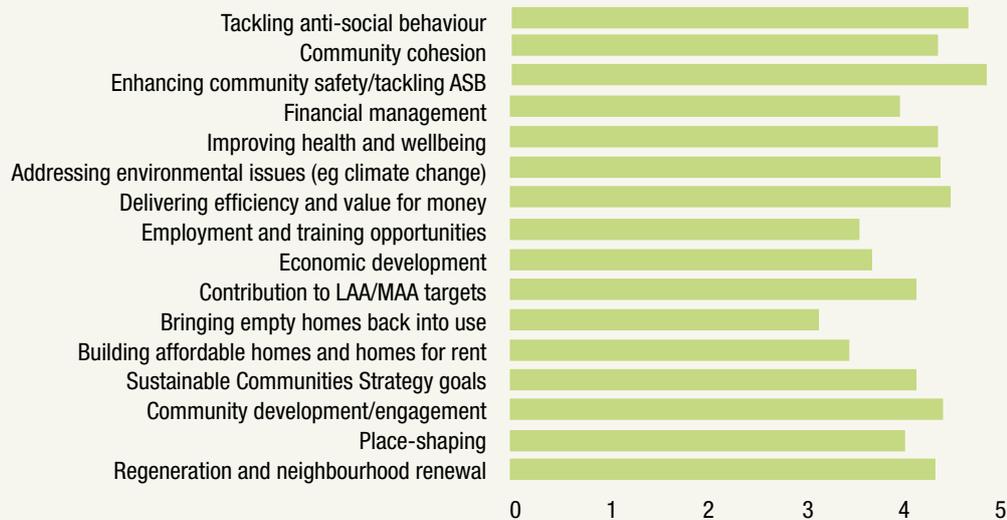
Retention of the housing stock helped to address the issue of community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour more than any other. Delivering efficiency/value for money, community cohesion and community development and engagement were also issues which respondents felt were addressed more effectively as a result of retention.

Key finding

All issues received an average score of more than 2.5, which appears to show that stock retention has a positive influence over how they are all addressed. Enhancing community safety/tackling anti-social behaviour is the area where retaining housing stock has had the greatest impact.

How do you feel retaining the housing stock has helped your council meet these strategic priorities/aims?

1 = not helped at all, 5 = helped significantly



Comments from survey respondents

“As a small district the focus is on locally delivered services and by retaining we have led the way on supporting the strategic objectives of the Authority”.

“The sheer weight of opinion amongst tenants in favour of stock retention, and their interaction with tenants, helped Members appreciate the value of a good housing service and consequently has helped drive forward the overall housing agenda locally”.

Links between retained council housing and delivery of front line council services

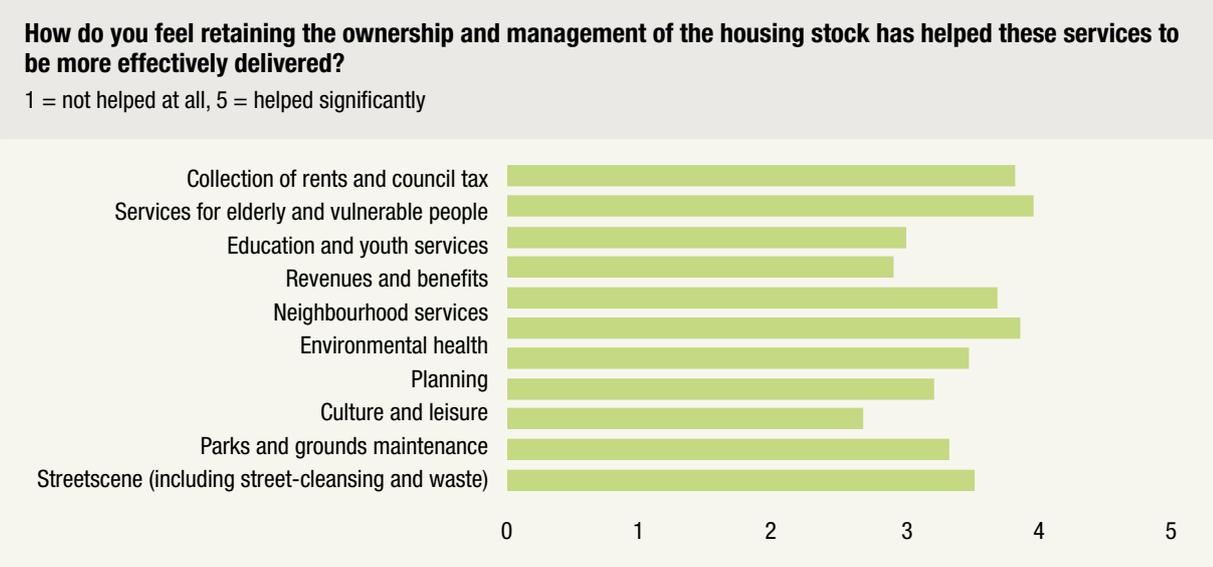
A question was asked about how retention of the housing stock has helped with the delivery of a range of front line services. The table below shows that retention definitely provides benefits for the delivery of other services.

Staff working within a single organisation can liaise more closely and effectively when delivering different services to the same individual

Respondents thought that all the services identified had benefited as a result of having the housing stock retained. There are clear reasons why this should be the case. A single organisation can collect, retain and secure information about people more efficiently than more than one organisation can; staff working within a single organisation can liaise more closely and effectively when delivering different services to the same individual; services such as environmental health and planning are intrinsically linked to identifiable properties; sections delivering front-line services such as street cleansing, waste collection and grounds maintenance have the flexibility to concentrate on specific neighbourhoods to tackle issues which are impacting negatively upon tenants and residents.

Key finding

Stock retention has the biggest impact upon effectiveness in rents and council tax collection, services for the elderly and vulnerable, neighbourhood services and revenues and benefits.



Comments from survey respondents

“Housing management delivery for our retained stock is undertaken as part of a wider neighbourhood management approach, so services delivered at a local level, managed by neighbourhood managers. We have links into corporate climate change agenda and have begun to target specific investment for this for our retained stock”.

“The level of contact/liaison between rent officers and Housing Benefit is a huge benefit when ensuring HB is paid on time and accounts are reconciled regularly”.

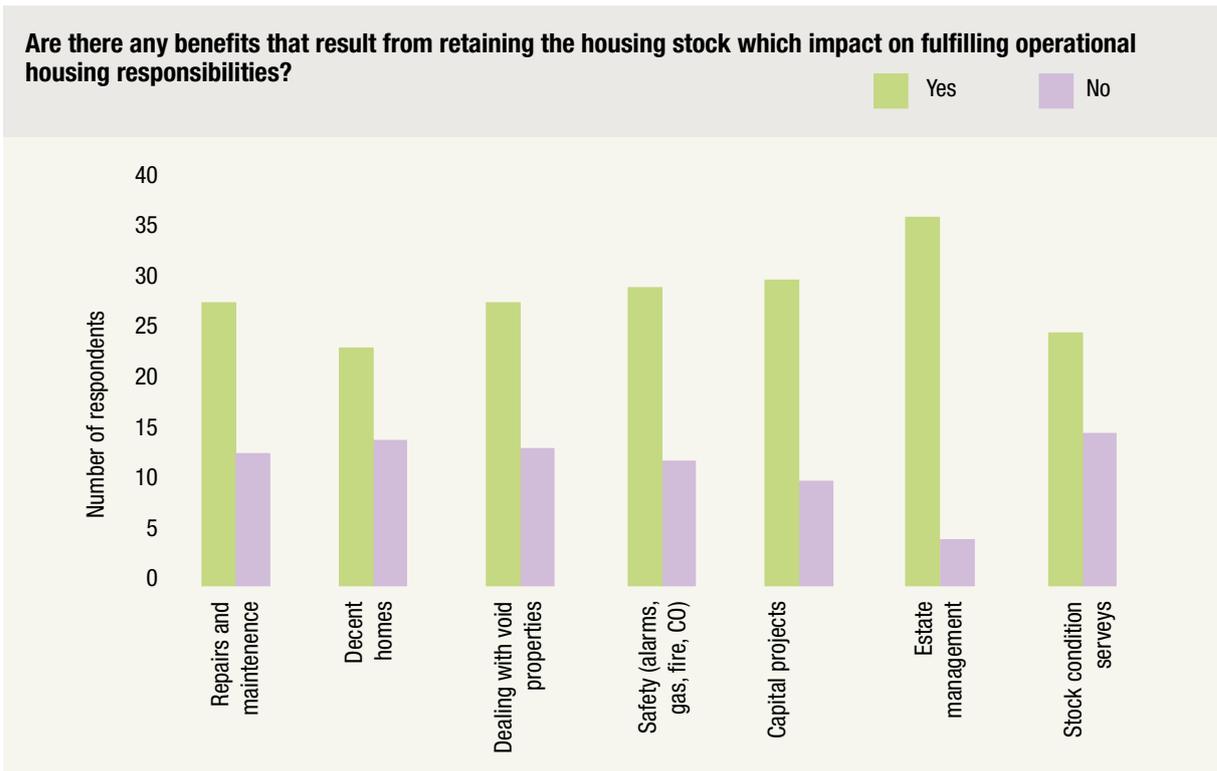
Examples include “Corporate Joint Debt Support Team, Membership of Child Protection and MAPPA committees, Jointly funded Safer Neighbourhood Teams with Police” (Scottish Council)

Links between retained council housing and delivery of operational housing services

When asked about the benefits of stock retention on fulfilling operational housing services, the majority noted that there were benefits to be gained.

Key finding

Across all operational functions, 70% of respondents felt that retaining the stock provided benefits to carrying out these functions.



Comment from survey respondent

“Turnaround of empty properties can be better co-ordinated with housing needs service to make better use of stock, estate management services improved through tackling issues with other council services (such as EHO, sport in dealing with anti-social issues)”.

Service delivery arrangements

The arrangements for delivering housing services are mixed across those councils completing the survey with in-house and external providers working together. Those councils completing the survey reflect the wider group of housing providers where some are arranged on an area basis with in-house and external providers being responsible for a particular area. Others provide a repairs and maintenance service in house but contract out capital projects. Some councils carry out all work with an in-house team whilst others have partners in place to undertake the work. Yet others use external providers for a limited number of services such as roofing, gas servicing, painting and glazing.

Key finding

There are mixed service delivery arrangements, but in all cases the council remains the responsible body charged with ensuring a quality service is provided at an appropriate cost.

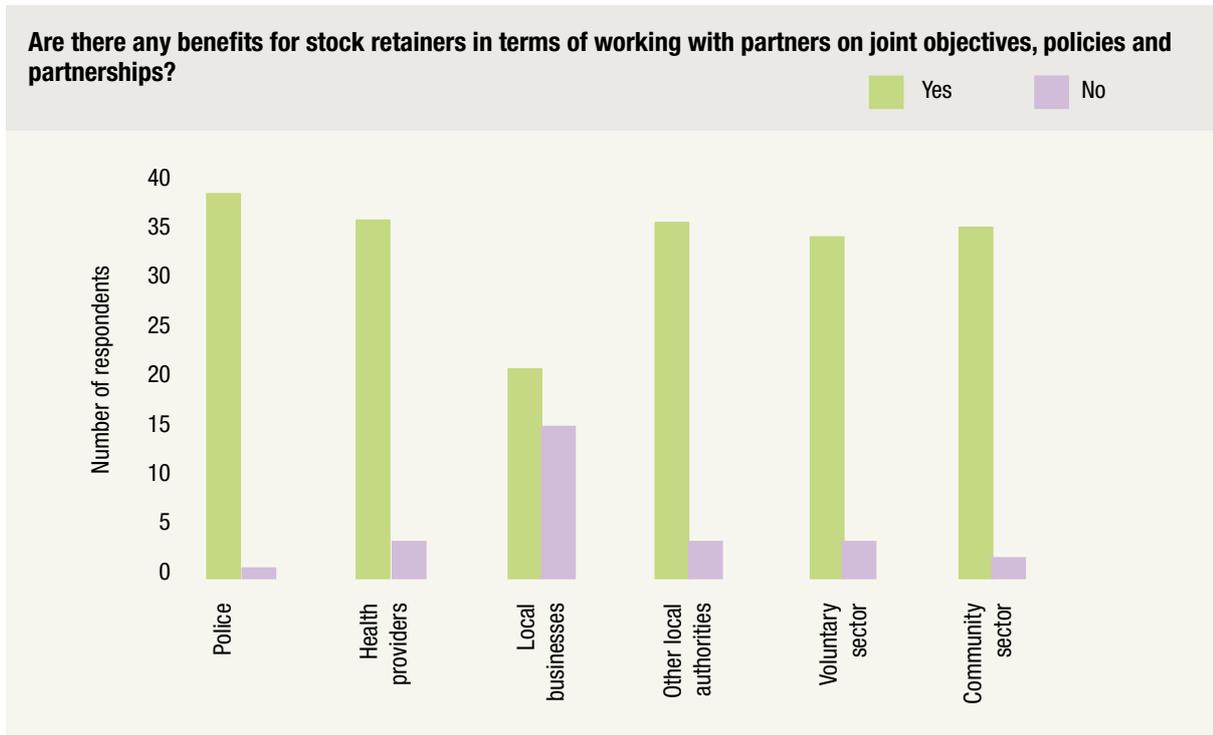
Links between retained council housing and partnership working with external bodies

When asked about working with partners, respondents highlighted substantial benefits were registered. A total of 86% of those who responded said that benefits existed as a result of retaining their stock.

The highest number who thought there were benefits pointed to partnership working with the Police. This reflects the work on anti-social behaviour primarily but also on community relations and engagement. Elements of housing work are directed to enhancing life chances for tenants and leaseholders and this necessarily involves working with the community and voluntary sectors and health providers. Stock retention avoids the need to involve a third party (i.e. ALMO or RSL) when providing services which originate with the Police or council.

Key finding

Stock retention has clear benefits for working in partnership with other agencies, particularly when working with the Police.



Comments from survey respondents

“We have very close co-operation with City Police and Met Police - including Police bases on estates which enable Police to deal with ASB issues at a local level. Voluntary sector joint working helps to identify and resolve issues with vulnerable groups”.

“We play a key role in the Council’s Community Strategy and actively participate in most of the themed group such as the Crime and Reduction Partnership, Health Improvement Group and Greener Groups”.

“Working with police on Operation Focus to raid homes and rid communities of drug dealers, building trust re confidentiality and sharing information.” (Scottish Council)

We have “jointly located neighbourhood policing stations in tenant resource centres” (Welsh Council)

Policy and practice

A question in the survey related to the interconnection between policy and practice. A total of 83% of those who responded said they thought that being a stock retainer helped them relate policy to practice better and to adapt it when needed. This relates to the split between the council’s strategic and operational roles. When the stock is retained within the council (even though these roles are split within the organisation), respondents felt there were definite advantages to linking the policy/strategic and practice/operational elements of providing a housing service.

Key finding

The fact that the organisation providing the operational services is the same as the one drawing up and implementing policy is a clear benefit in the views of respondents.

Comments from survey respondents

“Allows you to directly influence policy within Housing, and have closer working links with Housing Management Services”.

“by having responsibility for both the management and maintenance of the housing stock

we are able to develop joint policies and joint delivery to the benefit of the tenant”.

A number of other comments were made by those responding to the survey. Some of these tackle fundamental issues such as; the reassurance that tenants receive from a democratically elected accountable body or how democratic involvement influences overall policy making of the council, so directly addressing the needs of the community rather than political agendas.

Also highlighted was the fact that councils are able to keep housing in the spotlight as was the contribution which could be made to agendas such as climate change, energy efficiency, worklessness, poverty and social exclusion. The link between local government and central government is important here and the ability to contribute to each other's objectives was also mentioned.

Better joined up working within councils was noted, as was the ability to share skills and knowledge within a single organisation rather than across several organisations. This can be highlighted by the recent episodes of flooding and heavy snowfall where the benefits of joint working are apparent. The availability of a staffing resource within a single organisation and managerial flexibility to respond to emergency situations has been a vital asset in those councils which have experienced such emergencies.

Comment from survey respondent

“The significant benefit of a retained housing stock is that all other services, internal or external, have one point of contact. Joint working – e.g. shared contract for grounds maintenance for parks and housing estates offers better vfm”.

Summary of survey results

The contextual information collated at the start of the survey points out the wide range of circumstances that the organisations whose officers have responded find themselves in.

However the responses made to this survey have been consistent. They point to a view that there are definite benefits which emerge from the fact that councils have retained their housing stock and that these benefits stretch across a number of functions of the council.

The general findings are that stock retention helps housing departments and councils meet their aims; it helps the housing section provide their own services better; it helps other sections and departments deliver a better service; it helps put housing policy into practice; and it helps partnership working.

Some respondents argue that related services can be better delivered by a single organisation than by several and that in doing so there will be knock-on effects to other services provided by the single organisation. Business plans in councils are set up so the actions of individual sections in meeting their own aims contribute to the more strategic aims of the council as a whole. There should be no surprise therefore when senior housing managers claim that the work they do in the housing section supports other operational and strategic objectives within the council. The aim of the organisation is to provide a holistic approach to managing the authority on the basis that there are widespread accepted benefits of doing so and housing is a fundamental element of that approach. The survey confirms this is the case, that those benefits do exist and that the housing service helps the council to deliver them.

The government has promoted councils as place-shapers and community leaders and more are taking this role seriously. As they do so, they are becoming more engaged with other service providers (public, private and third sector) and this too is reflected in this survey. Housing is one of the most basic of human needs and as a retained service, the council is in an influential position when setting up individual partnerships, local area agreements or small scale joint schemes. The work to tackle anti-social behaviour in conjunction with the Police is highlighted in this survey. It is an obvious example of where one would expect the council to work with another organisation to tackle a local issue. Councils and the Police work well together on this issue and retaining the housing stock is a significant contributing factor to them doing so.

It would be a surprise if those responding to this survey did not agree with the hypothesis that stock retention brings with it further benefits for public services which impact on people lives. However the fact that they do so does not diminish the value of the

survey – rather it clarifies the level of agreement across the sector with the hypothesis put before them and the examples provided are further evidence in support of it.

In the opinion of those responding to the survey, stock retention clearly enhances councils' ability to meet their own sectional and corporate objectives and to deliver quality housing and a range of other services.

The respondents to the survey reflect just one element of the service; the delivery side. Taken in conjunction with the point made in Section One about tenants making a positive choice to remain with the council as landlord, the results of the survey reflect the fact that the benefits which officers perceive from stock retention are also understood, experienced and appreciated by tenants and residents as end users of the service.

The tenants' and residents' perspective

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with tenants living in stock retained properties in Cornwall, Crawley, Croydon, Norwich, Stoke and Runnymede following a meeting of the ARCH Tenants' Sub-group – a network of regional representatives established by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service as part of ARCH's governance structure.

During the interviews, tenants reported that they are on the whole satisfied with the standard of their council accommodation, the service they receive and the neighbourhood in which they live. One tenant commented: 'They tried to transfer our homes but we protested. With the council you have cheaper rent and secure tenure. I moved into a brand new house 31 years ago and we wanted to stay with them. Repairs get done properly and the council is listening to us more.'

Another said; 'We are happy with standard of the house and get a very good service.'

Another pointed out that the council was doing what it could within the limitations of the national housing finance system: 'They do the best they can – it is not the council's fault they don't have the finances.'

They saw benefits of stock retention for priorities that went far beyond the properties themselves. Key themes that emerged were the contribution of council housing: as a foundation for all other important aspects of their lives; the role of council housing in community engagement; the improvement of the local environment in their neighbourhood; addressing anti-social behaviour; links to other services and energy efficiency. Specific arguments and comments from tenants included:

Council housing as a foundation

Tenants believed that secure accommodation was a vital factor in family life, health, education and well-being.

As one tenant put it: 'A roof over your head is important for everything. You can then build the rest of your life if you have that security. Council housing has been kicked down as far as it can go and it is now climbing up as people realise it's significance for health and education and everything else.'

Another commented: 'The health of the nation will suffer if people live in squalor.'

'Further afield from the housing, if you have a good estate like mine, it is not just about the housing it's about everything to do with the community,' said a tenant who has lived in a council home for 27 years.

Community engagement

What was apparent from interviews with regional representatives on the ARCH tenant sub-group was that involvement of council tenants in decisions about their homes was a strong catalyst for engagement in broader local democracy and a stepping-stone for community empowerment and improving local services.

One council runs area tenants' forums every six weeks, for example, and the chair of one forum reports that at least 20 to 30 people come along regularly to discuss issues, including a lady who is 94 years old. 'Sometimes it's a bit rowdy!' she said. The chair of this forum is also involved in managing the community centre on her estate, which belongs to council and is run and used by all local residents - not just council tenants. Visits from Citizens Advice

involvement of council tenants in decisions about their homes was a strong catalyst for engagement in broader local democracy

Bureau advisors to the centre, which benefited owner-occupiers as much as social housing tenants, have been particularly well received.

Another tenant representative explained that he sits on a tenants' and leaseholders' panel which has several sub-panels, covering matters such as disability, transport, leaseholder issues, sheltered accommodation, issues affecting minority ethnic groups and Tenants Services Authority scrutiny. These panels meet with the principal officers and councillors involved in housing and can ask for council representatives from other services to come along to talk about specific matters.

A father who brought his three children up on an estate and chairs the local housing service review group says his 21 year old son is now also part of that group: 'The message is getting out there to young people that the council will listen if you have ideas.' His involvement as a tenant has led to wider democratic engagement, such as being part of a community support improvement group and Local Strategic Partnership community engagement board. He is also trying to get a new community empowerment group off the ground.

The local environment and neighbourhood

Comments on the role of their council landlord in improving the local environment included:

'We have our own estate managers who make sure the paths are cleared and look after things like that and keep you safe.'

'The council looks after the whole neighbourhood. I sit on the estate improvement panel and we do inspections and make our estate better... Now our estate has not much litter because every month the tenants and residents get letters saying they are coming round and asking about problems in their streets, so everybody is vigilant. Now you can ring a number if there is an old banger on the street for example and get it removed.'

'The estate is nice and has a lot of greenery. That green environment is maintained by the council.'

'There is an initiative to combat fly-tipping but it always happens at night and they try to catch it on CCTV.'

The council maintaining entire neighbourhoods out of housing funds can also be a bone of contention: 'We pay for communal areas to be looked after out of our rents and owner occupiers benefit from that,' pointed out one tenant.

Addressing anti-social behaviour

'Wardens go all over the estate checking on anti-social behaviour. It now looks better and feels safer. I go on estate inspections as part of the estate improvement panel and police officers come along and wardens and councillors all come along and they all work together. It is getting a lot better.'

'The local council works with the police and the county council. There is a good Police Community Support Office and I let him know if there are problems – the whole point is that there are contacts and that gives people confidence.'

'We have a safer neighbourhood team and council wardens keep on top of it - but they can't eradicate it completely.'

'The council seem to have cracked graffiti - they brought in zero tolerance and cleaned up almost immediately every time and that wore the kids doing it out and they stopped.'

'Graffiti and anti-social behaviour is something they are hot on.'

'You only have to phone up and they are there – not just for council tenants but for everybody in the community.'

'The council has a service improvement board for environment – if we have a problem you know it will be dealt with. If someone had vandalised the bus shelter for example, I would call in the morning and it would be dealt with by lunchtime.'

Links to other council services

Typical comments on the way in which council housing provides strong links to other services included:

'The one stop shop helps with access to social services and health.'

'We now have a one stop shop down here – they are becoming very useful – they are

'The estate is nice and has a lot of greenery. That green environment is maintained by the council.'

'Wardens go all over the estate checking on anti-social behaviour. It now looks better and feels safer.'

being used by a lot of people who can access them and learn to look after themselves a bit better.'

'You receive more information being a council tenant – you are better informed than a normal citizen. The council has a one stop system where they put you through to the right department – if someone went to the tenancy officer they could direct them to what they needed.'

'If any of us have problems - domestic violence or debt and getting benefits we are entitled to - they point us in the right direction and the help is all under one roof.'

'If any of us have problems - domestic violence or debt and getting benefits we are entitled to - they point us in the right direction and the help is all under one roof.'

Examples of links to specific council services given included:

Social care

'If the housing officers know there are vulnerable council tenants, they can point them in the right direction so they can get other services they need.'

'My authority integrated housing and adult social services as one department and it's still settling down. Financially there are benefits to the council... Individual departments are not used to working together. This will bring them together and it's improving all the time... I manage the local resource centre and get a lot of feedback and the social services clients say they have a better connection.'

Young people

'Children's after school activities are provided but budgets are tight. Our housing department allocated £200,000 to youth involvement a few years ago but that has been reduced in the forthcoming budget. We need outreach workers to go round and talk to the children. There is a borough wide initiative to group all youth services under one hat and improve efficiency.'

'The InfoZone on our estate is a converted house which runs sessions for young people as well as afternoon tea for the pensioners.'

Sheltered housing

'The sheltered housing means older people are being looked after and have community wardens on the premises.'

Disability

'My house was built for disability access as I will end up in a wheelchair. It has a little garden and a parking area which is ideal for my disability.'

Police and health

'There is a police station in the council office.'

'We had a doctor's surgery and they build a larger surgery so when that is finished the old building will be a police station on our estate, so that is very good. The council does work with the police and the councillors chosen by the ward work with the police.'

Energy efficiency

'In 1985 they put central heating and double-glazing and that was a godsend and my boiler was replaced again two years ago when it was faulty. This condensing boiler has cut my bill.'

'We have had cavity wall insulation, double glazing and a new roof which we couldn't afford otherwise.'

3: Case studies

West Lancashire: a holistic approach

Context

WEST LANCASHIRE Borough Council is an 'excellent' rated authority according to the Audit Commission's March 2007 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) report. West Lancashire tenants voted for the council to be their landlord during a ballot in December 2004 and the council owns and manages 6,350 properties. Ballot promises included: investment in repairs; improved housing maintenance; enhanced tenant involvement; new housing development and regeneration; and reasonable rent levels. The district faces a mixture of issues including housing demand in rural communities, whilst the former new town status of much of Skelmersdale means there is a need for investment to enhance estates.

Bob Livemore, executive manager for housing and property maintenance, who heads up the housing department, is responsible for both the strategic housing role and direct provision and management of stock in the borough. (See 'Organisational Structure in West Lancashire Borough Council' chart below.) He explains: 'I am always seeing things with both strategic housing and housing provider hats on. Owning and managing our own stock allows a constant dialogue between policy and practice and greater flexibility to refine practice to reflect policy and vice versa. In terms of connecting with other council services, residents are aware that the council is responsible for housing and that connectivity means the authority can often solve a range of problems in one go by working so closely across services in a way that comes naturally when you are all part of the same organisation.'

Housing priorities

'Improving housing and ensuring that there is affordable housing available for local people' is one of West Lancashire's six key corporate priorities.

A primary housing target is to reduce the proportion of non-decent council homes from 14.97% as at 1st April 2006, to zero by December 2010. The council also seeks to ensure that at least 30% of homes allowed in Ormskirk/Aughton and Burscough are low cost and RSL homes, in line with the Local Plan. Key Initiatives include delivery of the Affordable Housing Strategy and sustainable housing regeneration projects in Skelmersdale, commencing with the Tanhouse Estate Regeneration Pilot Scheme.

According to the Audit Commission's latest CPA report, good progress has been made. Continued investment has further increased the percentage of decent local authority housing. Re-let times have reduced – properties in demand were turned around in an average of 16.24 days in 2007/8, although performance in this area still requires attention. The percentage of affordable housing developments increased from 3.9% to 23%.

The role of housing in delivering wider corporate priorities

The council has identified six key corporate priorities, including housing priorities as described above. Housing also links into each of the council's other five corporate priorities, which are: Protecting and improving streetscene and the environment; combating crime and the fear of crime; working to create and retain good quality jobs for local people; delivering cost-effective services; and providing opportunities for leisure and culture.

Making effective use of the council's retained housing role has been particularly important in addressing crime reduction targets and ensuring people feel safe – with a requirement that a minimum of 78% of people feeling that West Lancashire is a safe and secure place to live is maintained. This relationship between housing and tackling anti-social behaviour is explored more fully below.

The Audit Commission CPA report says: 'The council is making a positive contribution to wider community outcomes such as community safety, environmental sustainability and health. Overall crime fell by 11% in 2007-8. Fear of crime is falling and more than 80%

of residents feel it is a safe place to live. The council has helped to create 543 jobs and 600 business start-ups. The council demonstrates that effective arrangements are in place in the way it manages its use of resources.'

According to Kim Webber, the council's assistant chief executive: 'Our corporate approach is about bringing all the parts of the organisation together and delivering one vision and one set of priorities. All our housing related strategies, the borough and county-wide Sustainable Communities Strategy and LAA intertwine to make that possible. One of the benefits of direct ownership and management of housing is that it makes that inter-relationship easier to achieve.' Examples of this holistic approach in practice include; a handyperson scheme for older people, active participation by housing professionals in the Surestart initiative for children and work between the housing department and environment strategy officer on providing and promoting energy efficient housing in order to reduce carbon emissions and address fuel poverty.

West Lancashire has been at the forefront of using a process of organisational re-engineering to improve services while making savings and efficiencies. The council offers more than 100 services at first point of contact for customers either telephoning, using the website or coming in to see the council face to face. Having two customer services points that operate as one stop shops means that housing benefit and rent payment can be dealt with in the same location and the authority's income flow has improved as rent is paid more promptly. The housing repairs call centre is also integrated into the customer contact centre.

The council believes this means a better service at a reduced cost – and has figures to back it up. Over £1.5m of cash savings, both GRA and HRA, have been made to date since the programme started in 2004. Ms Webber's says: 'The less organisational barriers and smaller the organisational footprint the better. If you control housing and need to change what you deliver, it is easier to do.'

Community safety and anti-social behaviour

'Combating crime and the fear of crime' is, as previously noted, one of the council's key corporate priorities and an area where a holistic approach involving the housing department has made a clear contribution to achieving wider strategic goals. The approach taken highlights not only the way council services can work together, but also the way in which holistic solutions can be achieved by various public and voluntary agencies working together.

A specialist Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) Unit was established in 2000 to tackle tenancy enforcement, incidents of anti-social behaviour, juvenile nuisance and harassment. The team has successfully secured Anti-Social Behaviour Orders against a number of individuals and works with partner agencies to introduce Acceptable Behaviour Contracts as part of an overall strategy. The council set up a Multi Agency Problem Solving (MAPS) Team in 2003, which works across organisations and partnerships in a purpose-built office at Ormskirk Police Station. This is shared by the council's ASB Unit, Police, Fire and Rescue, Lancashire County Council staff and other organisations.

The council funds four Police Community Support Officers to work alongside Police Community Beat Managers and engage directly with the community. The housing department funds two posts in the multidisciplinary team at a cost of around £60k from the Housing Revenue Account. As well as police, fire, PCT, drugs and alcohol services, West Lancashire council staff also work with the county council's education welfare service.

Anti-social behaviour officer Steve Mahon, who is based at the MAPS office, says: 'The ASB focus ripples out to other services. If you came into the office you wouldn't know who were council officers and who were police. Two out of three ASB cases come through housing. ASB is one of tenants' biggest worries. Out of all the cases we have dealt with, only one has gone on to cause trouble elsewhere.'

On a practical level, the fact that the council owns the stock means that a maintenance team can easily be alerted to secure a property following a police drugs raid, for example, and the homelessness team can be warned when a person is going to require temporary accommodation following eviction.

This multi-agency approach enables 20 professionals to meet each month to share information and discuss ways in which they will work collectively. A particular example of

Police Sergeant Adrian Beardmore says: 'Just being in the same office means we can communicate more effectively. We feel more confident about providing information to the council than we would to other landlords.'

multi-agency working is a case where the poor state of a woman's council property was the initial signal that something was amiss, then the Youth Offending Team identified issues with her son. Social services picked up case and worked with the mother on parenting issues and a housing officer organised repairs to the property.

Police Sergeant Adrian Beardmore, who manages two crime prevention officers and youth involvement officers in the MAPS team, says: 'Just being in the same office means we can communicate more effectively. We feel more confident about providing information to the council than we would to other landlords. An integrated approach makes good common sense; there are issues that cannot be solved by the police. Working with the council landlord gives us another weapon against criminals; it is one thing being locked up, but another thing entirely when they are told they are in danger of losing their home.'

Tools used to tackle nuisance behaviour include; acceptable behaviour contracts, parental control agreements, anti-social behaviour orders, possession proceedings and witness support. The council also works with partners to provide a range of recreational opportunities for young people to help minimise anti-social behaviour and develop life skills. Anti-social behaviour on Birch Green estate has been cut following a successful initiative to target 17 known troublemakers. Street crime fell as result of council and police officers issuing orders and also providing positive activities for young people and conducting door-to-door visits.

The Fair Play project in Banks was run between the council and the police encouraged youngsters who were causing trouble to make a positive contribution to their area following complaints about late night football and nuisance behaviour. The scheme was launched by an Everton FC player. As well as signing acceptable behaviour contracts, the youngsters were involved in free alternative activities at North Meols Community Leisure centre in return for carrying out community projects. Such a scheme ultimately saves public authorities money as well as having positive outcomes because the youngsters do not need to be taken through the courts. This requires a joined up approach to budgeting.

A positive relationship has been developed with the local press in their coverage of ASB and this has proved a valuable means of ensuring residents are aware of the stance taken by the council and joint working between agencies. Headlines have included stories on; evictions of a tenant who had dumped rubbish and another who threw late night parties and the council warning others why the tenants had been evicted.

Neighbourhood management and environment

Strategy and property development officer, Brian Lussey, West Lancashire's lead officer for community safety and neighbourhood management, represents the council on the Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) strategy group. He says: 'The fact that we are in-house has made the process more seamless because there is not a clash of priorities. The fact we own our own stock also makes it easier for other agencies to talk to us.'

An example of neighbourhood management and environmental improvement to meet LSP priorities is a scheme in Skelmersdale, which allowed areas experiencing the worst deprivation in the district to receive specific attention. A sum of £3.7m from the government's Safer Stronger Communities Fund enabled landscaping work to take place, CCTV to be installed and remodelling of estates.

Community empowerment initiatives were also put in place. A tenant management board, chaired by tenant Mary Highton, was set up and tenant management groups were established. Consultation was carried out to decide what the money was spent on. A mobile ice-rink helped bring members of the community together, 'beat sweeps' activities brought together environmental health officers with other professionals and local people to clean up local 'grot spots'. All of these activities help address LSP priorities that had been identified along with other local agencies in a holistic way, with housing officers playing a co-ordinating role.

Tenant engagement

Margaret Highton, who is West Lancashire Tenants' and Residents' Forum chair as well as chair of her Estate Management Board, reports that she is happy with the service she receives and that repairs are usually conducted quickly. A computer at the community centre means tenants can go on line and report housing faults and also access other council departments.

She believes that 'housing does far more than provide homes.' She explains: 'It works with the police, helps stop graffiti, fly-tipping and litter, council caretakers clean up areas beyond the council's own properties, and grounds are maintained throughout the estate, regardless of whether the residents are tenants or owner occupiers.' Environmental works have been carried out and council owned garages on her estate have been converted into a recycling unit. A nature trail has been created on land owned by the housing department. She explains that the tenant and resident group has been 'revamped' and she is pleased that a number of young people have been recruited onto the EMB.

Regeneration and planning

The assistant chief executive and executive manager of housing are both on a corporate officer regeneration group, which means housing is embedded in regeneration principles and practice. A Skelmesdale Vision masterplan has been developed. Because the stock is part of the council's own assets, the authority can consider remodelling estates in line with regeneration priorities and in a way that coheres with its planning and land use strategy.

House-building

West Lancashire has been successful in its bid for government funding to build 17 new sustainable council houses in Skelmersdale. The grant from the Homes and Communities Agency is for just over £800,000 of the £1.7m needed and the rest of the cost will be funded from rental income. The proposed development is a mix of eight two-bedroomed houses, five three-bedroomed houses and four two-bedroomed bungalows. Owning housing means the authority's land and assets can be used to lever in finance for development. House building also helps provide economic stimulus and create jobs locally.

Services for elderly and vulnerable residents

The council runs a number of housing services specifically for elderly people, including sheltered housing schemes, home care link – with a lifeline alarm system - and meals on wheels. Local residents aged 55 and over across West Lancashire have a say in how local services are provided following the launch of the West Lancashire Borough Partnership Board for Older People. Agencies involved include West Lancashire Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, Age Concern, West Lancashire Pensioners Forum and West Lancashire Primary Care Trust (PCT). The district councils has also worked closely with the PCT and county council to deliver the Supporting People agenda and having greater control over housing stock helped that process, according to assistant chief executive Kim Webber.

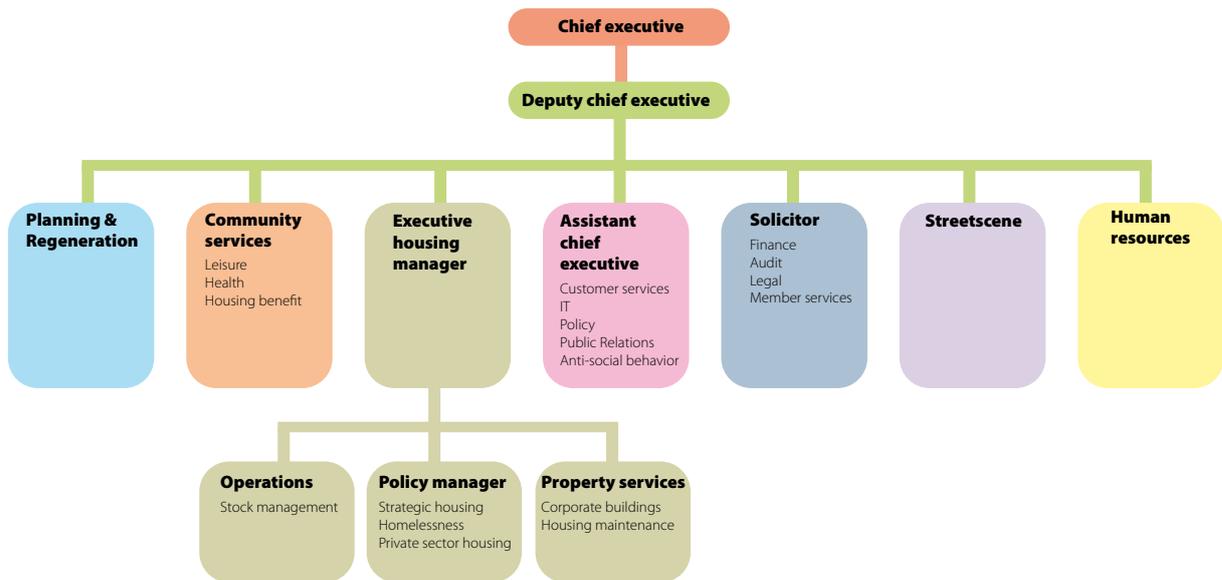
Rents and service charges

Tenants in West Lancashire will save on average, around £1.78 a week following the council's decision to implement rent reductions at the beginning of October, due to central government's revision of rent targets, with the cuts backdated to April. In addition, over 700 tenants who pay a weekly heating charge in addition to their rent are seeing heating bills reduced by 16% because the council has been able to negotiate new prices with gas and electricity suppliers and pass on the savings to tenants.

Conclusion

Examination of the holistic approach taken by West Lancashire Borough Council shows that the authority is fulfilling housing aspirations set out during the tenants' ballot. It also shows how ownership and management of housing stock can help deliver wider corporate priorities.

Organisational structure in West Lancashire Borough Council



Canterbury City Council: wider community outlook

MANY people associate the historic city of Canterbury with its cathedral, but it is also home to thousands of students and a large army barracks. Retained council housing in Canterbury has helped to influence policies in a way that taken these demographics into account and had a positive impact on the wider community as well as council tenants.

The city has three universities. The University of Kent is home to around 15,000 students and Canterbury Christ Church University also has approximately 14,000 students and the University of the Creative Arts has 900. Canterbury City Council has 5,500 homes across Canterbury, Herne Bay, Whitstable and the surrounding rural villages. By remaining a stock holding authority, the council has been able to influence many areas of work.

The council's head of housing, Larissa Laing, says: 'Remaining part of the council, we have real influence from the top down. Staff from the housing service are involved in setting the corporate priorities, which affect the direction of the council and this can have a positive impact on our tenants and the wider community.'

One example of this can be seen on one of the mixed tenure estates in Canterbury. The London Road Estate is a mixed tenure estate, with council-owned properties, owner-occupier and housing cooperative properties. There is also a large secondary school on the estate and the council was asked to sit on the board of the school. The council nominated the housing department to take lead on behalf of the council. As a result, the housing department has been able to work closely with the school, and other agencies involved with school to identify pilot studies to develop financial inclusion on our estates.

'This project has provided us and our tenants with real benefits as we had identified a need for a financial inclusion strategy, but being able to work with the school and raise the awareness of this issue within the council and in a partnership forum, we have also gained additional support in our pilots,' Ms Laing explains.

The council's close working relationship with the three universities has also benefited council tenants. Students studying social work at Canterbury Christ Church College have been doing work placements through the council's housing department, helping tenants. As part of their studies, they have to complete 100 days work placement, and the second year students spend three days a week working with council tenants from November to July each year. The students have worked with vulnerable residents, got tenants into voluntary work

and helped reduced anti-social behaviour.

‘They are really learning about the issues housing staff have to deal with,’ she says. ‘We feel that by having social work students, we can give them an insight into the issues facing many of our tenants which will help both the students and the tenants.’

Canterbury is also home to an army barracks. Howe Barracks is sized for a battalion. It is the home of the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment and the current occupiers are the 5th Battalion The Scottish Regiment, who were sometimes referred to as “5 Scots”.

‘We’ve been able to develop a good relationship with the Barracks,’ she adds. The council’s housing service worked with staff from the barracks to organise and run a cultural awareness day for local residents. Housing staff worked with other council teams including community development, and the public safety unit, soldiers from the barracks and tenants to highlight the issues of racism and build links between the local residents and soldiers and their families.

The leader’s perspective

Cll John Gilbey, leader of Canterbury Council says retained council housing gives his authority ‘power and control and enables us to house those who can’t afford their own homes’. Most of the Canterbury’s properties are up to Decent Homes standard and, with house prices outstripping salaries, the council is delighted to have been successful in its LABN bid to build some houses in Canterbury and Whitstable.

The leader believes that having retained council housing has been a benefit in terms of wider democratic engagement in the city. ‘It helps that we know our residents so well. You have greater understanding of the social issues in your community when you own the housing stock. The tenants’ consultative group is very active on all decisions. I have been impressed that they can speak openly to us. They come to every meeting to look at issues beyond their own homes,’ he explains. One of the issues the council is examining at present is shared housing and other services with nearby councils. The tenant’s consultative group was involved in considering this move and has supported it. Resident involvement in the Local Development Framework and Core strategy means tenants’ groups talking to planners as well as the housing officers.

Cllr Gilbey believes residents are offered a more holistic service because housing officers are well connected to colleagues in other council departments: ‘When our officers go and talk to tenants they can send outreach people and have linkage to services for more vulnerable people to ensure they get the benefits and support they deserve.’

Cllr Gilbey believes a lot of the communication between housing and other departments is taken for granted as part of their everyday work. ‘There is a lot of interdepartmental flow of information at all levels in our organisation. That information flow is natural. You know what else is going on and what is affecting each other. There is a more rounded view of the whole thing and you are often personal friends with someone dealing with an issue you need to know about. Efficiency changes we have implemented also mean departments help each other get things done in the most effective way.’

Having its own homes can also assist in meeting commitments of the council’s carbon reduction strategy as insulation and boilers have been upgraded to be more environmentally friendly. The new houses that are being built are to Code Four Sustainable Homes standards.

Carmarthenshire: a holistic housing standard

CARMARTHENSHIRE County Council realises that providing good quality, affordable homes is critical to improving residents’ health and well-being and creating sustainable communities. The authority has placed great emphasis on involving tenants in developing the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard (CHS), which covers the local environment as well as improving their homes and the services they receive.

In 2003, the council asked a thousand tenants to give their views on the Welsh Housing Quality Standard to inform its own CHS, which will bring 9,300 properties to a higher standard by 2014/5. The CHS ensures homes are: suitable for tenants’ needs today and for years to come; in a good state of repair; structurally stable; free from damp and significant condensation; well managed; and easy to access.

The leader believes that having retained council housing has been a benefit in terms of wider democratic engagement in the city. ‘It helps that we know our residents so well. You have greater understanding of the social issues in your community when you own the housing stock.’

‘The standard is not just about bricks and mortar, but covers levels of service and the wider environment and community,’ the authority’s executive board member for housing Cllr Hugh Evans explains. CHS seeks to ensure that council homes are located in safe, attractive environments and allocated in accordance with the community’s sustainability needs. This has led to: 84% of users satisfied with the housing service, 83% of tenants satisfied with responsive repairs service and 88% of tenants satisfied with their neighbourhood.

The council is investing more than £25m a year to ensure all its homes will be properly insulated and energy efficient and have new kitchens and bathrooms by 2014/5. A Major Works Agreement - the key document for tenants when work is being undertaken in their home – was written by tenants and staff together and 76% of tenants were satisfied with the opportunity to participate in decision-making.

Carmarthenshire has entered into a relationship with Cardiff and Swansea Universities, supported locally by the NHS, to undertake a 25 year assessment of the relationship between housing and health – the first research study of its kind in Wales. Preliminary research has revealed:

- where 21% tenants of unimproved properties reported being currently treated for depression, only 7% of the tenants of completed properties did so.
- 67% of tenants reported living in completed properties reported they were free from respiratory infection compared with 52% in unimproved properties
- 23% of respondents in unimproved properties visited their GP more than four times in a three month period compared with 14% in completed properties.

The authority is targeting the improvement of the local environment and promoting sustainable communities in the wider sense. ‘The CHS has a vital role to play in ensuring local communities are safe, vibrant, harmonious, attractive and inclusive,’ says Cllr Evans. ‘To achieve this, the authority ensures that our tenants and residents play an active part in identifying, planning and prioritising the environmental improvements in their neighbourhoods and has developed the Environmental Works Project (EWP) as a significant strand of the CHS.’

Officers have also worked with tenants to balance enforcement, preventative and support remedies in tackling anti-social behaviour and taken a lead role in bringing together partner agencies.

Carmarthenshire County Council has worked with the Local Health Board to support older people to live independently in their own homes and sheltered housing service and housing related support in the community have been reviewed by tenants, staff and partner agencies. ‘The result will be avoiding placements in care homes and facilitating hospital discharge both in terms of accommodation provision and delivery of adaptations/support in peoples’ homes. For instance, we have already made provisions for flexible step up/step down flats in sheltered schemes,’ says Cllr Evans.

The council’s holistic approach to housing is also creating jobs and training opportunities locally. The £25 million a year the CHS injects into the construction industry is being used to full effect through a Contractor Partnership on all major works. This investment has:

- developed and strengthened a relationship with Coleg Sir Gar, the main construction training provider in the county
- ensured that the construction skills required to deliver the CHS influence construction training
- provided contractor work placements for over 100 apprentices
- developed links and joint working with the Construction Youth Trust
- developed the Pink Ladies Scheme to encourage women into the industry

The tenant focused approach to service improvement means the authority won four TPAS Cymru Awards awards in 2008/09, including first places for tenant involvement in rural areas and its innovative approach to engaging hard-to-reach groups.

Conclusion

The involvement of tenants in setting the CHS means the comprehensive approach to improving properties and services taken by Carmarthenshire County Council is yielding wider benefits for local residents, environments, communities and the economy.

21% tenants of unimproved properties reported being currently treated for depression, only 7% of the tenants of completed properties did so.

Midlothian: building new homes to meet local needs

MIDLOTHIAN Council's house-building programme has enabled the authority to tackle lack of affordable housing locally in a way that also helps meet its social, environmental and economic objectives.

The authority has a population of almost 80,000, which is increasing and ageing. It owns some 6,000 properties, which means 77% of social tenants in Midlothian rent from the council. With more than 3,200 people on the waiting list for accommodation and high house prices in the area, the council decided that building new properties itself was an effective way to address local needs.

Councillor Derek Milligan, leader of Midlothian Council is confident that direct provision of affordable housing fits with the council's wider regeneration plans and other strategic aims. 'Delivering new affordable housing is a key element of everything we want to achieve and we have a clear strategy for ensuring the new properties have a positive impact on existing communities, the environment and economy,' he said.

Work started on site in March 2006. As at January 2110, 436 new homes had been built, 252 were under construction and a further 148 are planned to commence within the 12 months. The £110m project has been funded from the council's Housing Capital Plan. The ability to use prudential borrowing in Scotland has made the project financially viable as a result of being able to keep rents and right to buy sales receipts to offset debt. The authority views its new-build as 'an investment decision' and this has been made economically viable by spreading the cost across all the rents over a 60 year period, a move which followed consultation with existing residents through a series of open meetings.

The Scottish Housing Regulator inspection in May 2008 noted that in delivering its new homes, the council was, 'taking a good approach to working with partners and the local community to ensure it can deliver its plans,' had 'a good tenant focus when delivering its capital programme' and had consulted tenants when planning work to existing homes and making decisions about investment priorities. The building programme is being carried out alongside upgrading of all the existing stock, with the same kitchens, doors and central heating improvements across the existing housing portfolio.

Some of the new homes are houses for elderly people adjacent to a new 60 bed care home, which helps demands placed by an aging population. In tandem with the new build housing programme, the new £6m Care Home, three new Primary Schools totalling £26m and a £9m Leisure and Library Centre have all been procured and managed by the council. The fact that the council is responsible for the house-building as well as provision of the other facilities makes effective co-ordination of infrastructure, utilities and other practical measures more readily achievable. It also means the new homes are considered as part of the councils 'overall vision for creating sustainable communities,' according to Cllr Milligan.

The new developments are sited largely on brown field land and gap sites at: Cameron Crescent, Poltonhall, Bonnyrigg, Burnside Road, Gorebridge and Barleyknowe Crescent, Mayfield, Hopefield, Dalkeith and Penicuik. The new council homes are being built, as far as possible, to good environmental, space and quality standards and with low maintenance taken into consideration and good energy efficiency ratings with low running costs for tenants as a result. They have been planned to meet a range of different needs among local people, and achieve secure by design standards and also use renewable energy where feasible. A number of the properties have solar panels and analysis to date has identified that around 11% of materials used are from recycled components.

As well as helping meet the council's environmental and social aims, the construction of the new properties is also an economic boon to the area. As Councillor Milligan, explained: 'Midlothian's building programme is providing jobs in the construction industry locally, which are increasingly valuable to the local economy since the downturn. This has a knock-on impact on suppliers and boosts the economy. Contractors were encouraged to employ a percentage of apprentices as part of pre-qualification criteria and have seen this as an opportunity to embrace apprenticeships, which is enhancing skills and opportunities locally.'

Conclusion

The construction of new council properties in Midlothian is helping meet the authority's vision for social and environmental sustainability and economic regeneration as well as pressing need for affordable homes locally.

Milton Keynes: addressing homelessness and reducing waiting times

MILTON KEYNES Council has made improvements in addressing homelessness and removing unnecessary waiting times for housing; in particular for young homeless people and young people leaving care. This was achieved by taking a lead on the issue and working holistically with a range of partner organisations.

The council has introduced a novel housing options scheme. The scheme is based on an 'options' interview, which provides advice to all and help with direct housing for people in urgent housing need. The scheme does not allocate property on a points basis, nor does it require people to bid for properties like most schemes. Instead, people are able to make a real choice of home from a range of properties which match their need.

Clients are offered a real choice of homes from a pool of property made up of; the councils own stock, private rented accommodation, social housing to which the council has nomination rights, or shared ownership for those who can afford it.

As a consequence, there is no register and no waiting list. There are on average 1,000 approaches from the public each month, but less than 20 homeless applications a month, and only about 100 clients in temporary accommodation. On average a permanent home is found in about eight weeks, this includes specialist accommodation; for general needs housing the outcome can be sooner. This compares with substantive numbers of homeless applicants and at its peak in 2002/3 over 1,600 households in temporary accommodation.

The scheme has a range of options to help homeless young people.

For those leaving care early contact between children's service and the housing service is used to provide suitable accommodation linked to appropriate support services.

A Tenant Support team helps the more vulnerable to sustain their tenancy, services include:

- Setting-up home in a new tenancy
- Advice and assistance with welfare benefits claims
- Budgeting advice and assistance
- Access to other agencies and services
- Access to health care
- Support in establishing social contacts and activities
- Developing social skills

To help young people weigh up the option of a rented home of their own versus continuing to live with parents a range of literature was developed to facilitate self-resolution. The housing providers and third party agencies in the local area developed this through the Milton Keynes Youth Housing network.

For those whose family circumstances have broken down mediation, thorough a third sector provider, is considered. A single point of referral, via the third sector, is in place for those who can not return home and may have other needs which require specialist support. For those in crisis needing emergency accommodation, to avoid the use of bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation, a "night stop" service is being introduced. The service enables access to a room in a family's home for which the family offers somewhere to stay and support for up to 28 nights.

Conclusion

Ownership and management of housing in Milton Keynes has had genuine advantages in supporting homeless people.

For those leaving care early contact between children's service and the housing service is used to provide suitable accommodation linked to appropriate support services.

South Derbyshire: joining strategy and practice

AS only one of three local authorities in England to have been awarded two stars with excellent prospects for strategic housing by the Audit Commission, South Derbyshire District Council knows the importance of a holistic approach. Commission inspectors published their report on the council in September 2008 and said the local authority had a good understanding of the local housing market with strong links both strategically and operationally with partners. The inspectors flagged up the local authority's strong approach to strategic housing. The inspectors praised the council's housing department for the good relationship it has with other departments, particularly with planning, which, amongst other things, has resulted in an affordable housing guide for developers in the district.

The inspectors praised the council's housing department for the good relationship it has with other departments, particularly with planning

Strategic housing role

The council's dedicated private sector housing service works alongside the public sector housing sector service. Their private sector leasing scheme works in conjunction with the public sector housing landlord function, so the local authority can nominate people from its waiting list into the private sector leasing scheme. This means that the local authority can offer rent guarantees to prospective tenants of properties, which are being offered through their own private sector team meaning that landlords are more likely to accept low income households.

The council also takes a strong partnership-based approach towards homelessness. The local authority is working with registered charities, which provide floating support for mental health and a homeless hostel. Another housing association provides the domestic violence refuge and yet another unit supports teenage mums. 'If you are a stand-alone housing association, it would be difficult to get that kind of partnership working in place,' according to the council's head of housing Bob Ledger. 'Because we are the council, lots of organisations are willing to work with us to deliver on the wider agenda.'

Links to health and social care

South Derbyshire also has a shared standard in the private and public housing stock for disabled persons adaptations. The Mr Ledger explains that it operates a tenure blind service for DFG and public sector adaptations, which means the council is committed to the same level of customer service in both sectors. By taking such an approach and being seen to deliver a good service, the council has also been able to secure additional resources from both the health authority and social services for disabled persons adaptations.

Telecare systems, which provide add-on alarms to the standard 'panic buttons' for elderly or vulnerable residents, are also being used in South Derbyshire in new and innovative ways with the council piloting a hospital release scheme through Telecare. Derbyshire County Council's social services department, who are providing the equipment, is supporting the pilot scheme. The district council is putting the Telecare equipment into houses of people released earlier from hospital and helping to monitor their progress. The authority is also piloting a scheme to monitor domestic violence through the Telecare system.

Allocations

All the registered social landlords (RSLs) in the district are on the same choice-based letting (CBL) system, including the council, so there is only one waiting list for housing in South Derbyshire. The system covers all 11 housing associations in the district, plus the council, and means that people only have to fill in one form to apply for housing. Negotiating this arrangement had to be led by the council. Being a stock retained authority put the council in a strong position to not only lead on the issue but also take the other organisations along with it.

Anti-social behaviour

Another area of joint working is in tackling anti-social behaviour. Through the local Crime Reduction Partnership, housing officers are working with neighbourhood wardens, PSCOS and police officers to tackle local issues.

Working with the finance department

Mr Ledger says the close working relationship between the housing department and the finance department in the local authority means that they can fast track housing benefits claims if people are being threatened with homelessness.

Corporate plan

South Derbyshire District Council has seven housing actions in its corporate plan, which reflects the priority that housing is given in the district. The council's ownership of 3,100 properties also means that landlord and tenant issues are familiar territory for both members and other officers. Retained housing stock means that members are fully briefed about housing issues and can represent the area when attending meetings for the local strategic partnership or in LAA negotiations.

Planning and new development

Because both planners and members at the council see housing as a key issue, the local authority now has an agreement that 40% of any new developments will be given over affordable housing. Because South Derbyshire is a growth point area, it could mean that thousands of new affordable homes could be built in this area over the next 30 years. For example, the council is currently negotiating planning permission for more than 2,500 houses in the northern part of the district and 40% of those will be affordable homes, which demonstrates the priority housing has been given in the district.

Conclusion

South Derbyshire is a particularly pertinent example of the way in which retained council housing can enhance the local authority's strategic housing role as well as impacting upon service delivery in practice.

Wandsworth: enhanced service delivery

LONDON BOROUGH OF WANDSWORTH is a Comprehensive Area Assessment 'excellent' rated authority which believes retained housing management enables closer working relationships throughout the council, producing enhanced services and progression of key projects. A selection of examples is cited by the council.

Dangerous dogs

Dangerous dogs were a significant issue for Wandsworth residents and members, and the problem was addressed through changes to tenancy conditions and the requirement for housing residents to microchip their dogs. Ian Stewart, head of housing management, says that the key to the effective implementation of the initiative and its delivery within a short timescale was the close liaison with the borough solicitor, policy teams and dog control service, which would have been more difficult to deliver if the housing stock had not been retained by the local authority.

Emergency control

The retained housing management's emergency control service is also a good example of a holistic approach. The service provides the out-of-hours and emergency response for housing estates and the whole council. The creation of this service included the establishment and support of emergency reception centres in the borough. This role is carried out solely because of the council's detailed knowledge of the area and links seamlessly to functions within other departments which could not be undertaken by an external managing agent who, when involved, simply utilised a security firm to cover their obligations.

Care services

Mr Stewart explains that extra care, a key strategic objective, has been delivered through the close relationship between the retained housing management's warden services, adult social services and the corporate policy team. This includes floating extra care in existing sheltered schemes and decant of an entire block in preparation for conversion to an extra care scheme.

Highways

Wandsworth's highways are maintained and cleaned by a different department, but with many public highways running through housing estates, there was previously a situation with one contractor cleaning the hardstanding and grassed areas and another cleaning the adjacent roads. Close co-operation between the two departments lead to the streamlining of the cleaning functions with responsibility resting with a single contractor.

Anti-social behaviour

Regarding anti-social behaviour, Mr Stewart says his officers work "hand in glove" with the community safety group, again in a different department, to ensure a seamless approach to tackling anti-social behaviour in the borough.

The emergency control service ... is carried out solely because of the council's detailed knowledge of the area, and links seamlessly to functions within other departments.

Local democracy

The retained housing model is also proving the best democratic model for residents who wanted to affect change. 'Our services are more accountable to our local residents than if they were outsourced or transferred,' he says.

Conclusion

Ownership and management of housing stock offers significant benefits in terms of delivering a range of services on the ground in Wandsworth, a selection of which are examined above.

Warwick: working with other agencies

FOR WARWICK District Council, the benefits of a holistic approach to retained council housing stock lie in partnership working with other agencies. The council's tenancy enforcement team within housing works closely with the corporate anti-social behaviour team, allowing a joined up approach to tackling ASB that would not otherwise be possible.

This is particularly important when it comes to ASBOs, as there is a protocol within the Warwick district that the police will take the lead and the council will supply information. This allows a consistency of approach across the main forms of tenure. This starkly highlights the difficulty of obtaining information from RSLs in relation to ASBO applications with regard to their tenants.

Bill Hunt, deputy chief executive, explains that as part of a joined-up corporate approach to community safety, the council has used its retained stock to turn an unused under-block area in one of its multi-storey blocks into a joint housing/police office base. In addition to providing accommodation for the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) working in this neighbourhood, it is also a drop-in facility with full and secure communications links for any police officers in the district to use. The office is used as a base for housing officer surgeries and the co-location of PCSOs means joint surgeries can be held to deal specifically with ASB issues.

On another estate, an under-block space has been converted into a community centre and is used as a base for community development workers from the community partnership team, a jointly funded team of officers from both tiers of local government within the county. Local councillors run surgeries from the facility and a host of community groups use it as well.

Conclusion

Warwick DC has reaped the benefits of working in partnership with external bodies and the fact that its housing is owned and managed by the council makes such relationships easier and more effective.

An under-block space has been converted into a community centre and is used as a base for community development workers from the community partnership team.

4: Recommendations

A LACK of research on the specific role of local authorities whose tenants have chosen their council as their landlord has been identified. The time was therefore ripe for exploring the benefits that local authority ownership and management of homes can bring to councils and the communities they serve.

The wider benefits of stock retention are often taken for granted and the research wanted to explore them explicitly. This research tests out the belief that local authority ownership and management of housing offers ‘added value’ in terms of supporting councils in delivering services more holistically and meeting economic, social and environmental goals. This section draws together the key themes that have emerged from the research and makes recommendations for further exploring and maximising the potential of retained council housing in meeting local government’s broad-ranging objectives.

As stated at the outset of this report, the aim of the research was not to assess the relative merits of different models of social housing provision. However having done the research the benefits of retaining the housing stock under direct council management are clear and evidence exists to highlight them. As such stock retention remains as valid a housing option as any other for existing and prospective tenants.

This research was intended to take a first step in exploring the ways in which retained housing can link with other aspects of local government policy and practice. It has demonstrated the following links, which are presented in diagrams that follow:

- ***links between retained council housing and wider local government duties and strategies (see page 48)***
- ***links between retained council housing and local government’s strategic housing role (see page 48)***
- ***links between retained council housing and policy and practice priorities (see page 49)***

Recommendations for maximising the holistic benefits of retained council housing

This research shows that retained council housing can add value in delivering local authority services and objectives. However, further research is required to fully explore those benefits and the appropriate policy and financial framework needs to be put in place at national level to enable the holistic benefits of retained council housing to be more fully realised locally. Suggestions for achieving this are as follows:

A higher profile for retained council housing

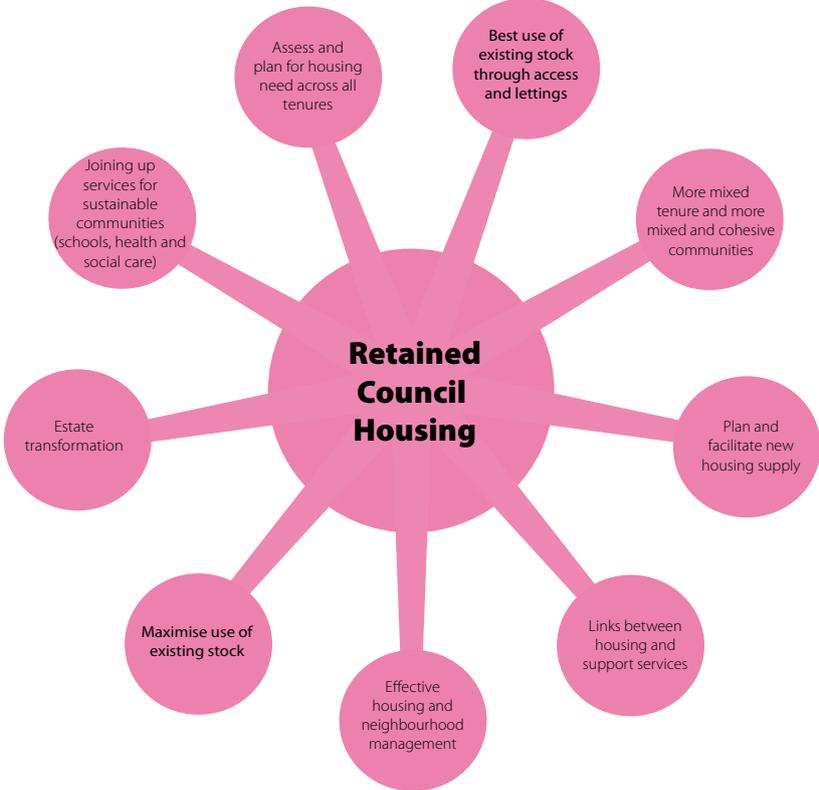
APSE and ARCH have worked to promote the role and significance of the retained council housing option and this has resulted in greater political recognition for the sector. APSE has long-standing members from councils across the UK who are providing front-line services including ALMOs and housing associations as well as stock retainers. Its Performance Networks service provides comprehensive benchmarking for housing services across all affordable housing options as well as APSE’s policy and research arm campaigning on housing issues. ARCH’s press and lobbying profile and membership have grown significantly in the past three years. The total number of properties now owned and managed by ARCH member authorities is some 60% of local authority housing stock in England.

Both bodies are working to ensure that retained council housing as an option is given appropriate status, profile and resources to reflect that fact that its tenants and residents have chosen their council as their landlord and remain satisfied with the services they receive – despite inequities in the present legal and financial framework in which stock retainers operate.

Retained council housing at the centre of council duties and strategies



Retained council housing at the centre of local government’s strategic housing role



Retained council housing at the centre of council priorities



Assessing the holistic benefits of affordable housing options

This research has been a first step in exploring the holistic benefits of council housing but its scope has not enabled relative merits to be assessed against other social housing options. It is therefore suggested that the Chartered Institute of Housing, Local Government Association, National Federation of ALMOs and National Housing Federation and their equivalents in Scotland and Wales join together with APSE and ARCH to undertake a wider research project in partnership to examine robustly the holistic benefits that different housing options can provide.

Considering connectivity with the strategic housing role

While this research has touched upon the ways in which retained council housing can be effective in enabling local government to fulfil its strategic housing role, this is an area that requires further detailed consideration. It is suggested that a detailed research project be undertaken to do so, again with assessment of the effectiveness of stock retained authorities in comparison with other options.

A fairer policy and funding framework

APSE and ARCH have campaigned arduously for a fairer footing upon which council housing can operate. Recent measures to enable this to happen, in the form of proposed changes to the HRA subsidy system and opportunities for council building, should be continued and expanded into the next Parliament to allow council housing to once again be an option of choice for all, not a last resort for the few.

Towards a Decent Neighbourhoods Standard

APSE has developed a Decent Neighbourhoods Standard, as described in Section One of this report, which takes the Decent Homes Standard beyond bricks and mortar and considers the wider environment in which homes are situated. As the deadline for Decent Homes is reached, adopting such a standard, backed up by sufficient funding, would enable local authorities to approach provision of housing in a much more holistic fashion to ensure connectivity with the local environment and address broader global concerns about climate change and sustainability.

The importance of housing to local economies

The importance of housing to the economy has become increasingly apparent during the recession and the Government's *Building Britain's Future* strategy stresses the role of skills and apprenticeships in the UK's economic recovery (HMG 2009). Building new council homes is a way of boosting local economies, jobs and skills. New homes that are built should ensure that commissioning and procurement is used in such a way that the impact on local supply chains, labour markets and the provision of apprenticeship opportunities, as well as environmental sustainability, is maximised.

A holistic approach to housing finance reform

The Government has agreed to reform the much-criticised HRA finance regime and is currently considering responses to its consultation. APSE and ARCH have submitted responses to the consultation which support self-financing models to allow greater local control and freedom over housing resources. In their submissions, APSE and ARCH supported ring-fencing of housing funds as there is currently a trend towards the HRA being used for non-core housing purposes in order to support related activity, such as maintaining non-council owned areas on estates. While attention to such activities is a benefit of the holistic approach that can be taken as a result of ownership and management of stock, it is suggested that future funding regimes explicitly reflect the financial contribution made from housing budgets to other services.

Conclusion

THIS RESEARCH has shown that local authority ownership and management of housing can offer a range of benefits in helping local authorities address the wider objectives. The benefits that emerged can be grouped under three themes: links to wider local government duties and strategies; links between policy and practice in meeting a broad range of local government priorities; links between ownership and management of housing and local government's strategic housing role. Further research should be conducted to further explore these benefits and a policy and funding framework should be put in place to allow these benefits to be maximised.

Methodology

THE METHODOLOGY used for this to the research was in a five stages. The first was to identify key themes and hypothesis which encompassed the benefits of stock retention . A literature review and policy overview was conducted to place stock retention within the overall context of local government's strategic objectives and activities. In-depth interviews were conducted with at West Lancashire DC to get a detailed picture of the holistic links provided by stock retention. This made it possible to develop a model, mapping inter-connectedness of housing and local government's other roles and relationships with external public and voluntary sector agencies. This also enabled questions for an on-line survey to be conducted among stock retained authorities that are members of either ARCH or APSE. The on-line survey provided quantitative data and helped identify other case study authorities from the survey and carry out interviews. The respondents in the survey from English, Scottish and Welsh stock retained councils were from authorities whose size ranges from 1,264 properties up to 40,485. The average stock size is nearly 8,800 properties. In terms of political control, 19 councils are conservative controlled, 5 are liberal democrat controlled, 5 are labour controlled and 11 have no overall control. One council is SNP controlled. City of London council is apolitical. Responses to the survey were received from 26 lower tier councils, 13 unitary councils, two London boroughs and the City of London. The tenants' perspective on the wider benefits of stock retention was gauged during in-depth semi-structured interviews with six ARCH tenants' sub-group regional tenant representatives.

Gathering evidence from all of the above allowed themes to be identified and the 'added value' of local authority ownership and management of housing in meeting local government's wider roles and objectives to be explored.

References

- APSE Briefing 06/25 *Visionary Leadership In Housing: a new future for local housing strategy* May 2006
- APSE *Future for social housing in the UK: exploring the options* April 2003
- APSE *Housing stock transfer: the only option?* June 2000
- Association for Public Service Excellence, Centre for Local Economic Strategies, and Institute of Local Government Studies (2008) *Creating resilient local economies: exploring the economic footprint of public services*, APSE 2008
- ARCH Report on ARCH Membership Survey, Summer 2008
- ARCH response to TSA consultation on new regulatory framework, February 2010
- Available at: www.arch-housing.org.uk
- Audit Commission Strategic approach to housing KLOE January 2010
- Audit Commission inspection information available at: <http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk/Pages/searchresult.aspx?&k=strategic%20housing&c=ALL&ps=any&dt=A%20C%20InspectionReport&ord=rank&res=10&p=0>.
- BBC News Funding doubled for council homes, 17 April 2009
- Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/8003097.stm>
- Calcutt, J, Calcutt Review of House-building delivery, Department for Communities and Local Government, November 2007
- Cave Review of Social Housing Regulation 'Every Tenant Matters' (published in June 2007)
- Chartered Institute of Housing *Delivering Housing Strategy through LAAs*, CIH 2007
- Chartered Institute of Housing Skills for Success: *Developing Proficiency in Strategic Housing* CIH, 2007a
- Chartered Institute of Housing *Visionary Leadership In Housing Series: Housing and the Economy Integrated Strategies*, CIH August 2008
- Chartered Institute of Housing *Success through Skills: Maintaining Proficiency in Strategic Housing* December 2008
- Cochrane, A, SNP steps back in time with council house sales ban, Daily Telegraph, 15 Jan 2010 Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/alancochrane/6998457/SNP-steps-back-in-time-with-council-house-sales-ban.html>
- Czerniak C, Show Homes, The MJ, 22 September 2009
- Department for Local Government and Communities *Strong and Prosperous Communities* Local Government White Paper Volumes 1 and 2 October 2006
- Department for Local Government and Communities *The Strategic Housing Role of Local Authorities: Powers and Duties*, CLG, September 2008
- Housing minister John Healey's speech to the Fabian Society on 9th December 2009
- Available at: <http://www.fabian-society.org.uk/events/speeches/healey-speech-housing-after-the-crunch>
- Hardman I, *Future of ALMOs in limbo amid subsidy reform confusion*, Inside Housing, 20 November 2009
- Her Majesty's Government *Building Britain's Future*, HMG 2009
- Hills, J, *Ends and Means: The future roles of social housing in England*, Department for Communities and Local Government, February 2007
- House of Commons, Communities and Local Government Committee Housing and the Credit Crunch, HoC February 2009
- House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, twenty first report of session 2009-10, The Decent Homes Programme, House of Commons, March 2010
- IDeA Community leadership and the strategic housing role in local government
- IDeA/Planning Advisory Service *Foundations for the future: A councillor's guide to strategic housing* IDeA Good practice in place-shaping and the strategic role
- Joseph Rowntree *The Impacts of housing stock transfers in urban Britain* February 2009
- Leitch Review of Skills, 'Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills' (published in December 2006)
- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill 'Strong and prosperous communities', HMSO, 2007
- Lyons M *Place-shaping and a shared ambition for the future of local government* A final report March 2007
- National Audit Office, *The Decent Homes Programme*, NAO, January 2010
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive

- Statistics for homelessness in Northern Ireland
Available at: http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/about-us-home/media_centre/key_issues/homelessness-3.htm
- Pawson H *Analysis of local authority housing management performance 2006/07* Housing Quality Network Briefing Paper, HQN, February 2008
- Reilly B, *The Price of Freedom, Inside Housing*, 16th October 2009
- Selman A *From bricks and mortar to people and places – managing neighbourhoods and communities* HQN November 2005
- Shelter *Latest waiting List data 2008/9 for England, and Wales*. Available at: http://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_issues/waiting_lists
- In Scotland in 2007-08, data on households made homeless applications to their local council Available at: http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing_issues/research_and_statistics/key_statistics/homelessness_facts_and_research
<http://www.sheltercymru.org.uk/shelter/home/default.asp>
- Sherman, J Brown orders thousands of new council houses, *The Times*, 30th January 2009
Available at: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article5614919.ece>
- Simpson M et al, *Visionary leadership in housing: a new future for local housing strategy*, CIH and LGA, November 2005
- Tenant Services Authority, *A new regulatory framework for social housing in England*, TSA, November 2009
- Thornhill, J (ed) *Transforming estates*, ECOTEC and the Chartered Institute of Housing October 2009
- Trowers and Hamlins *Positive Stock Retention Strategies for Local Authorities* June 2006
- Unison *A New generation of council housing: an analysis of opportunity of need, opportunity, vision and skills*, Unison, November 2009
- Warburton M, *Implications of the new local government agenda for housing*, Housemark November 2008

Appendix 1

List of stock retained councils and number of properties owned in England

Council	No of properties		
		Kesteven DC	3839
Adur DC	2668	Kingston upon Hull City Council	27992
Arun DC	3416	Lancaster City Council	3814
Ashford BC	5235	LB of Barking and Dagenham	19337
Babergh DC	3551	LB of Camden	23931
Barrow-in-Furness BC	2739	LB of Croydon	14043
Birmingham City Council	65711	LB of Greenwich	24431
Bolsover DC	5412	LB of Harrow	5067
Bournemouth BC	5100	LB of Southwark	40496
Brentwood BC	2543	LB of Wandsworth	17206
Bristol City	28417	Leicester City	22446
Broxtowe BC	4633	Lewes DC	3289
Cambridge City Council	7438	Lincoln City Council	7968
Cannock Chase DC	1922	Luton BC	8217
Canterbury City Council	5278	Mansfield DC	6835
Castle Point BC	1542	Medway Council	3059
Chesterfield BC	9823	Melton BC	1901
City of London	1887	Mid Devon DC	3106
City of York	8012	Mid Suffolk DC	7078
Corby BC	4818	Milton Keynes Council	11626
Cornwall (former Caradon stock)	3549	New Forest DC	5300
Crawley BC	8103	Northumberland (former Alnwick DC stock)	1764
Darlington BC	5450	North Tyneside MBC	15769
Dartford BC	4359	North Warwickshire BC	2771
Dover DC	4646	North West Leicestershire DC	4502
Dudley MBC	11575	Northampton BC	12252
Durham (former Durham City Stock)	6160	Norwich City	15841
East Devon DC	4298	Nuneaton and Bedworth BC	6019
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	11020	Oadby and Wigston BC	1265
Epping Forest DC	6592	Oxford City Council	7875
Exeter City Council	5063	Portsmouth City Council	15241
Fareham BC	6320	Redditch BC	6085
Gosport BC	6592	Reading BC	7376
Gravesham BC	5993	Richmondshire DC	1631
Great Yarmouth BC	6123	RB of Kingston upon Thames	4854
Guildford BC	5158	Rugby BC	3931
Harlow DC	9956	Ryngymede BC	3021
Harrogate BC	3941	Selby DC	3157
Hinckley and Bosworth BC	n/a	Shepway DC	3447
Ipswich BC	4986	Shropshire Council (former Bridgenorth DC stock)	4300
Isles of Scilly Council	108		
Kettering BC	3826		

Central Beds (former South Bedfordshire DC stock)	5236	Thanet DC	3117
South Derbyshire DC	3101	Thurrock BC	10341
South Holland DC	3919	Uttlesford DC	2878
South Kesteven DC	6268	Warwick DC	5623
Southampton City	6212	Waveney DC	4651
St Albans DC	5300	Waverley BC	4986
Stoke on Trent City	19480	Wealdon DC	3111
Stroud DC	5245	Welwyn Hatfield Council	9337
Swindon BC	10542	West Lancashire DC	6350
Tandridge DC	2686	Winchester City	5096
Taunton Deane BC	6106	Woking BC	3491
Tendring DC	3228	Wokingham DC	2713

Totals

Authorities = 105 Properties = 815012

Source

This list is based on Business Plan figures submitted to DCLG in April 2008 and ARCH information from ARCH membership information forms. Figures are subject to fluctuations.

Appendix 2

Scottish Housing Survey Table: Estimated stock of dwellings by tenure 1983-2008

	Total number of dwellings (000s) ¹	Socially rented dwellings ²									
		Owner occupied		Rented privately or with a job/business ³		Vacant private dwellings and second homes		From housing associations ⁴		From local authorities, New Towns, Scottish Homes	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
December 1993	2,193	1,217	55.5	154	7.0			67	3.1	755	34.4
December 1994	2,210	1,258	56.9	155	7.0			77	3.5	721	32.6
December 1995	2,230	1,293	58.0	155	7.0			91	4.1	692	31.0
December 1996	2,248	1,327	59.0	154	6.9			99	4.4	668	29.7
December 1997	2,266	1,366	60.3	154	6.8			115	5.1	630	27.8
December 1998	2,283	1,400	61.3	154	6.7			121	5.3	608	26.6
December 1999	2,303	1,435	62.3	155	6.7			131	5.7	583	25.3
December 2000	2,322	1,472	63.4	155	6.7			137	5.9	557	24.0
March 2001	2,307	1,373	59.5	161	7.0	82	3.6	139	6.0	553	24.0
March 2002	2,332	1,403	60.2	170	7.3	84	3.6	143	6.1	531	22.8
March 2003	2,349	1,438	61.2	171	7.3	85	3.6	238	10.1	416	17.7
March 2004	2,369	1,472	62.1	176	7.4	81	3.4	251	10.6	389	16.4
March 2005	2,389	1,483	62.1	198	8.3	82	3.4	251	10.5	374	15.7
March 2006	2,408	1,500	62.3	215	8.9	80	3.3	251	10.4	362	15.0
March 2007	2,429	1,517	62.4	222	9.2	83	3.4	261	10.8	346	14.2
March 2008	2,451	1,535	62.6	234	9.5	83	3.4	269	11.0	330	13.4

Note: Estimates up to 2000 are based on the 1991 Census. Estimates from 2001 onwards are based on the 2001 Census, GROS dwelling counts and Scottish Household Survey (SHS) tenure splits and are not strictly comparable (see notes page).

1. The tenure of privately owned stock is dependant on occupancy. From 2001 the privately owned vacant dwellings are shown separately. The number of vacant dwellings is not known prior to March 2001 and so these are included within owner occupied and rented privately.

2. Socially rented figures include occupied and vacant dwellings as the tenure of socially rented stock is not dependant on the dwelling being occupied.

3. Includes accommodation tied to employment and others living rent free.

4. Stock transfers took place in Dumfries & Galloway, Glasgow and Scottish Borders in 2003, in Argyll & Bute and Eilean Siar in 2006 and Inverclyde in 2007. Estimates for 2003 onwards will reflect this change of tenure

APSE

2nd floor Washbrook House
Lancastrian Office Centre
Talbot Road, Old Trafford
Manchester M32 0FP

0161 772 1810
0161 772 1811
enquiries@apse.org.uk
www.apse.org.uk

ARCH

John Bibby
ARCH Secretary
Director of Housing and Community Services
Lincoln City Council, City Hall
Lincoln LN1 1DE

01522-873200
email@arch-housing.org.uk
www.arch-housing.org.uk

Price

£20 to ARCH and APSE members
£40 to non ARCH and APSE members

ISBN: 978-1-907388-02-6