

ARCH Tenants' Conference 2012

Report



Getting a fair deal for tenants



On Wednesday 19 September, 'Getting a fair deal for tenants' was the theme for the 2012 annual ARCH Tenants' Conference. This event organised by the ARCH Tenants' Group for tenants of the 62 ARCH member councils who have retained their housing stock.

138 delegates and speakers met at the Kettering Conference Centre on the 19 September. It is the 6th conference that the ARCH Tenants' Group have been involved in organising. They worked with Chartered Institute of Housing events team and HouseMark to plan the venue, the programme, speakers and chaired workshops and registered delegates on the day to ensure that the event ran smoothly.

The conference was a chance for tenants from stock retained councils from across the country to hear about and discuss topical issues affecting council housing including the challenges facing the local authority sector and what this means for tenants. Topics covered on the day included welfare reform, self-financing, value for money tenant scrutiny and community engagement.



The conference was held at Kettering Borough Council. The Mayor of Kettering, Councillor Jim Hakewill, presented two of the ARCH awards at the event. The Excellence in Participation Award was kindly sponsored and presented by Pinnacle psg.

ARCH Tenants' Group chair takes the helm

There was a buzz in the room as Peter Kirkpatrick, ARCH Tenants' Group chair and tenant of Great Yarmouth Borough Council, opened the conference welcoming delegates and thanking Kettering Borough Council, and Pinnacle psg for sponsoring the excellence in participation award.



Thank you Kettering



The conference this year was supported by Kettering Borough Council and Head of Housing John Conway welcomed delegates to Kettering with an overview of Kettering's housing challenges and how they have addressed this with

particular reference to their 'homes for the future' programme to bring older properties up to standard so that they are more energy efficient and cost effective for tenants to heat.

John also told delegates about their life skills programme 'move on, move in' to help ensure younger tenants are able to sustain their tenancies and develop new skills.

'We have a good relationship with our council. We work in partnership and tenants really do have their say in Kettering' said Martyn Lund, from the ARCH Tenants' Group and involved tenant of Kettering.

Residents have a key role with ARCH



Councillor Paul Ellis, newly elected Chair of ARCH and cabinet member for housing at London Borough of Wandsworth said: 'ARCH is there for the benefit of residents as well as the local authority organisations who are ARCH members... residents have played a key role as ARCH has developed over the years'.

Challenges facing the sector and what this means for tenants

Paul Downie, Deputy Director, Affordable Housing Management and Standards at the Department for Communities and Local Government addressed the conference.

'With just under 2 million homes, the local authority sector is a significant player in housing...there are a number of pressures and challenges on the housing sector; financial pressures; just under 400,000 households are under occupying their homes; just over quarter million households are overcrowding their homes in the private rented and social housing sectors; we have increasing numbers on the waiting lists with over 1.7 million households registered on them in England with long waiting times.'

Paul went on to say that 'The Government reforms to address these challenges include more financial flexibility for local authority landlords; more effective use of social housing; fairness and transparency for existing and new tenants and better regulation'.

'Welfare reforms are starting to have an impact and we are well aware that this will create pressures and difficulties for some...it is going to be tough'....' there are more opportunities for tenants to take control though 1.3 million of new grant for tenant empowerment and community cashback'.

Questions and comments from delegates included concerns about; welfare reform the bedroom tax and impact on pensioners; when will the new building of homes be seen; right to buy and new owners renting out at exorbitant rents compared to what social housing neighbours are paying.

Workshops share practical ideas

Here are some highlights from the six workshop sessions:

- For tenant scrutiny to be effective, tenants need to know it has made a difference. Feedback and communication are key and the culture of the organisation will have an impact. Trust is also an important part of the relationship.
- Effective community engagement at Kettering has resulted in tenants now having a real 'ownership' of the area... talking to people has been key to this and engaging young people.
- Welfare reform - payment online is causing concern as some people can't access it or the internet. Because of the bedroom tax some people will lose 25% of their benefit income and some organisations do not have 1 bed properties available to move to.
- Open forum - the bedroom tax and how older people will be penalised were key topics of discussion. Participants were surprised that more lobbying wasn't taking place. The session also discussed repairs cash back and health and safety issues and apathy for tenant participation.
- Self financing - local authorities must now run as businesses and have business plans which tenants need to be involved in drawing up.
- Value for money - the group looked at what value for money means and its alignment to the organisations purpose. Wandsworth shared their example of their asset management strategy for filling in the gaps eg developing properties in place of garages



Workshop presentations

Presentations and notes can be found at the end of this document

1. What has been achieved through tenant scrutiny?

Jennifer Holmes, chair person of service evaluation group (Scrutiny) West Lancashire Borough Council & Carole Halfacre, Assistant Director of Consultancy, HouseMark

2. Effective Community Engagement

Linda Nash, Housing Communications Officer, Kettering Borough Council & Martyn Lund, Voluntary Member of Kettering Borough Council

3. Welfare Reform - How will affect tenants?

Colin Wiles, CIH Eastern Regional Board & Jim Nicholl ARCH Tenants Group

4. Open forum tenants workshop

Peter Kirkpatrick, chair of ARCH Tenants' Group, Alison Moore, chairperson of tenants and Leaseholders Committee, Exeter City Council & Matthew Warburton, Policy Advisor ARCH

5. Self financing - what this means for landlord and tenants

Steve Partridge, Director of Financial Policy & Development, CIH Consultancy, Carl Brazier, Strategic Head of Tenant Services, Stroud District Council & Michael Hewlett, Chair Tenants & Leaseholders Panel, Borough of Croydon

6. Feeling the pinch - Getting value out of money spent- what people out there are doing?

Gez Kinsella, Assistant Director - Consultancy HouseMark, Councillor Paul Ellis, Cabinet Member for Housing London Borough of Wandsworth & Kevin Lovatt, ARCH Tenants' Group

ARCH awards results 2012

The ARCH awards are an opportunity for local authorities and their tenants to showcase their achievements with others and receive recognition at the event. The nominations and winners of the ARCH awards were announced at the conference.

Peter Kirkpatrick, chair of ARCH Tenants' Group introduced the nominations in each of the three categories and ARCH chair, Councillor Paul Ellis announced the winners and the Councillor Jim Hakewill, Mayor of Kettering presented the awards for Innovation and Sustainability and Tenant of the Year categories.

Andy Cook from Pinnacle psg who kindly sponsored the Excellence in Participation award, presented the trophy to the recipient with Cllr Jim Hakewill Mayor of Kettering.

Innovation and Sustainability award



CROYDON COUNCIL

Croydon Landlord Services - London Borough of Croydon won the Innovation and Sustainability award for their

'All ages' intergenerational project for integrating different age groups into Croydon's resident involvement project and achieving a reduction in anti social behaviour as a result'

Excellence in Participation award- (Sponsored by Pinnacle psg)



North Tyneside HOMES

North Tyneside Homes - won this award for their innovative model of tenant scrutiny which is delivering

real outcomes for tenants including changes to the Empty Homes standard; savings of £11,000 through their review of how tenant satisfaction surveys are carried out and new process for how tenancy review visits are carried out that will improve access and make them more effective.

Tenant of the Year Award

Four people were nominated for this award and the panel found it a difficult decision as all had contributed so much and were clearly making a difference through their involvement.



Birmingham City Council

The award went this year to **Michelle Fleet**, from

Birmingham City Council for demonstration of kindness and selflessness in taking on the role of resident representative during a programme of refurbishment work and putting the needs of others first despite her own poor health.