



What's next for tenants?

ARCH Tenants Conference 22 September 2016 Leamington Spa, Warwickshire

About the conference

This year's 10th Conference organised by ARCH Tenant Group members took place in a year of unprecedented change to the sector with over 100 delegates and speakers attending. The focus of the conference was on the changes that the Housing and Planning Act and the Welfare Reform and Work Act will have on tenants. The new legislation passed this year will have significant challenges and impact on Councils and their tenants and the conference was an opportunity for ARCH member tenants to find out more information. There was also an opportunity for delegates to get abreast of the digital agenda with examples of how tenants are using online technology in one of the workshops.

This annual conference for ARCH members is organised by tenants for tenants. The ARCH tenants group work with the event management team to plan and develop the programme and venue arrangements. The chair of the ARCH tenants Group chairs the conference; Members of the Tenants group chaired the workshops, registered and greeted delegates as they arrived and helped with other event management tasks on the day.

The sponsors

This year's conference was generously supported and sponsored by ARCH member Warwick District Council and Ian Williams, maintenance contractor. The refreshments in the morning break was sponsored by Thistle Insurance.

Time to discuss and share

The annual conference provides the opportunity for tenants from ARCH members, all councils with retained housing stock across the country to get together and hear about and discuss the key issues that are affecting council housing and what this means for tenants. We were fortunate to have this year officers from the Department of Work and Pensions and the Department of Communities and Local Government at the conference running workshops to help delegates understand what the two new pieces of legislation have introduced.

[Click to view all presentations and workshop slides.](#)

Introduction and welcome - ARCH tenants' group Chair

Jenny Hill, Chair of the ARCH tenants' group kicked the day off with a warm welcome to delegates and hosts and sponsors for the event. Jenny advised that the ARCH tenants Group have had a busy year working with the ARCH Executive to make representation to the Government for changes in their proposed policies.

A warm welcome from Warwick District Councils' Housing and Property Portfolio holder

Councillor Peter Phillips welcomed delegates to the Conference and to Warwick DC. The Council were proud to be able to host and support the conference this year in their area and with their association with ARCH



ARCH and the ARCH tenants' group are influencing the agenda

John Bibby the Chief Executive Officer of ARCH explained the role of the ARCH tenant's group working in influencing decision making with the link with the Executive team as two members of the Group are Directors of ARCH and sit on the Executive Board. The tenant's views are important as well as ARCH members and this year the tenants group have input into consultation about the legislation. John explained that ARCH are striving to continue to represent members views as the detail of the legislation is rolled out. ARCH have a meeting with the Minister Gavin Barwell on the 12 October where they hope to be able to make the case for Council housing.

How cuts to Councils contractor's repairs and maintenance services impact on tenants

Mike Turner from conference sponsor Ian Williams kicked off the session with some audience participation asking delegates whether they thought in the past year their repairs service has got better or worse. The majority in the room thought their service had got worse.

Ian's presentation covered examples of what other organisations were doing to improve the service including the repairs MOT.

Ian Williams and EROSH (the Essential Role of Sheltered Housing) have worked together to produce a new Sensitive Contractor Guide which will help contractors to support tenants through these challenging times.

Ian stressed that Councils, contractors and tenants need to work together to deliver effective repairs services. Ian also mentioned that digital technology plays a key role in the efficiency and productivity of repairs services.

Workshops.

There were 4 workshops for delegates to choose from which ran twice morning and afternoon so each delegate had the opportunity to attend two different workshops.

1. Life time tenancies

Frances Walker, Head of Social Housing Management & Allocations Team – Department, Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

Frances explored with delegates the implications of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 as it restricts the use of lifetime tenancies. In future with some limited exceptions including those tenants who already have secured tenancies, local authorities will only be able to offer fixed terms tenancies. Although at the time of the conference the actual length of time for the fixed term tenants had not yet been published it is likely to be no more than 5 years.

2. Welfare reform

Annette Madden, Universal Credit Programme, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)

Annette shared with workshops attendees the latest on the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 covering the benefit cap, tax credits and the roll out arrangements of Universal credit and work coaches in Job Centres. There were lots of questions in the workshops about timescales,

exceptions, right to appeal and training for job centre staff as Job Centres are being increased as the role out programme develops.



3. Pay to Stay, Right to buy and sale of High Value Housing Assets

*Alan Millward, and William Richardson, Department, Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
John Bibby, CEO Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH)*

This workshop explored a mandatory 'pay to stay' scheme that Councils will have to introduce by April 2017 which means that households living in Council housing earning above a defined threshold will have to pay a higher rent for compared to others on rents below the threshold. There will be a taper introduced so that the amount paid increases with income earned. This workshop also covered the obligation by councils under the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to sell higher Value housing stock as they become empty to create income to pay for more housing to be produced. Final detail about the implementation arrangements and guidance are still to be published.

4. The Housing Act and the digital world

John Popham, Digital storyteller

John took the delegates attending this workshop through some examples of what can be achieved using digital technology including social media like Facebook and twitter, YouTube and mobile phone apps that can all help to link people up and make communication instant and how some housing organisations and tenants are using this. John also offered to assist delegates with their IT gadgets over the lunch break at the conference.

At the end of the conference workshop chairs, all members of the ARCH Tenants Group, feedback a few snippets and highlights from each of the workshops.

ARCH Community Champion Award

After lunch the 'Community Champion' award was presented. This is a special award from ARCH to recognise a tenant or a member of their household for their hard work helping to achieve great things for their community. There were 7 nominations for the award this year from ARCH member Councils: Birmingham, Lewes, Lincoln, Rotherham, Royal Borough of Kingston, Stevenage and Wandsworth.

The panel of tenants and an ARCH Executive all agreed that although they were really impressed with all the nominations there was one that stood out for them so the award for the ARCH Community Champion 2016 was presented to William Jones 'Ted'. The Chair of the ARCH Tenant Group and CEO John Bibby presented the award to 'Ted' who was delighted.

A summary of the excellent work of all nominations for the award and the winning entry for Ted.

And it's thank you and goodbye from us.....

At the end of the conference the Chair thanked all the speakers for making it a very interesting day as well as conference supporters and sponsors. Warwick DC, Ian Williams and Thistle. The Chair also thanked her colleagues on the ARCH Tenant Group for their continued hard work.

A free prize draw kindly sponsored by HouseMark was then drawn from a hat and the winner of an electronic tablet was Margaret Tillotson from Ipswich Borough Council.

