

ConTACT

A NEWSLETTER PRODUCED BY TENANTS OF WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

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TACT AT THE TUC



City Council delegates John Bond, Ken Gore and Alan Rickman (third row back) at the conference.

The Defend Council Housing conference in May was held at TUC Congress House in central London. Alan Rickman (TACT Evening Group Chair), TACT members John Bond and Ken Gore, and Cllr Antony de Peyer, joined council tenants from all over the UK to hear Michael Meacher MP kick off the proceedings by praising Austin Mitchell MP for taking the lead in getting great support for the campaign, signing up nearly 150 MPs.

Jack Dromey, T&G Deputy General Secretary, joined other speakers in

giving interesting speeches, and the message from them all was very clear:

- tenants are not getting a fair deal from the Government,
- tenants want honest debate not myths peddled by Government and they want to be listened to.

Over 90 councils have tenants wanting to stay with their council as landlord. The message from the tenants to their MPs is, you have been elected into office by many of us, and can be removed by us as well. TACT is non-political, but cannot ignore comments made at meetings, let's hope the Government takes heed and gets the message.

TACT REVIEW

The review of TACT being carried out by PEP is now well under way. By the time you receive this newsletter many of you will have received an invitation and attended a Focus Group to have your say on what you think of TACT, or you may have taken part in a telephone survey.

WRITE TO TONY BLAIR

You can write to Tony Blair supporting the Defend Council Housing campaign. Just click on their website at www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk and you can download the letter or sign online.

If you don't have access to the internet, call Ken Gore on 01962 861 916 and he will make sure you get a copy.

TACT WRITES TO RUTH KELLY

TACT Chairs David Cruden and Alan Rickman have written to Secretary of State Ruth Kelly:

Your opinions on the Fourth Option differ from ours, but the three month consultation period on council housing is at least a start in the right direction.

continued on page 2....

Thank you for your time and watch out for the results in the next edition of ConTACT.

INSIDE

Page 2
Stop Blackmailing Councils

Page 3
Keyed Off

Page 4
TACT Independent Day



STOP BLACKMAILING COUNCILS

MPs have reacted angrily to misleading information coming from the Government to its own Members, when a Parliamentary Labour Party brief said the Fourth Option would require 'additional public funds'. "It wouldn't", says Defend Council Housing campaigner and MP Austin Mitchell. "It will be financed by stopping Government taking money from council Housing Revenue Accounts."

Michael Meacher MP goes one further in The Times of 28th July, saying: "The Government is blackmailing council house tenants. If they haven't decided by August to leave the control of their local authority, and submit themselves to a private landlord or a housing association or an independently managed company, they will suffer the consequences - a slow slide into rack and ruin. All central government funding for repairs and modernisation will cease for those tenants who have the temerity to want to stay put." He goes on to say that the Commons Public Accounts Committee has found that the Private Finance Initiative costs on average more than £1,300 per home than if the council did the work, and then there's the army of consultants paid out of the public purse to advise and facilitate.

"There has been a massive under-investment in house building in the last 15 years. The upshot of that has been a doubling of the number of homeless families in temporary accommodation, particularly in the South East. A change of policy is needed," he declares. "Receipts from Right to Buy sales, which so far have yielded £45 billion, would be recycled in full into more and better council housing. Gap funding

schemes to subsidise transfers into the private sector, on which the Government is spending £180 million, would be withdrawn. All this money would be more than enough to begin to jack up the social house building programme to meet today's desperate shortages."

continued from page 1....

Tenants are not happy that Housing Revenue land has to be given to Housing Associations so they can build affordable housing, when it should be council homes being built, with the funding provided by the Government. You take away 40% of our Housing Revenue from us through the housing subsidy system, money that could solve many of our problems.

Many tenants are angry at the large amounts of money that have to be spent on Housing Options surveys. The results often being negative to any change, only to be told we will have to do it all again in the future, no doubt with the same results as before. The money could be far better spent on the houses themselves.

TACT wishes you well in your new job, but please remember, as tenants we have a big say in our future housing. We trust you will support us.

WELCOME PACKS

The Tenant Participation Compact Monitoring Group is working on new welcome packs for tenants moving into an area covered by a Tenants Association (TA). These will contain information common to all TAs and some, more appropriate to the local area, that the new tenant has moved into. We are hoping to launch these packs shortly.

GET IT TAPED If you would like any of the information in ConTACT translated into another language, or made available in large print or audio format, please call the Tenant Participation team on Freephone **0800 716 987**.

TACT MEETING DATES

Meetings of the Afternoon Group are held on a Wednesday at Makins Court, Alresford, from 2-4pm, and of the Evening Group at The Guildhall, Winchester, from 7.30-9.30pm unless otherwise stated below:

15 November 2006
2pm & 7.30pm

6 December 2006
7.30pm - 9.30pm
Joint meeting - Rent Setting

17 January 2007
2pm & 7.30pm

21 February 2007
2pm & 7.30pm

21 March 2007
7.30pm - 9.30pm
Joint meeting

ALL TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS WELCOME

For further information contact Glynis Cole on Freephone 0800 716 987.

WORTHY NEWS

The Worthys Tenants Association has had another productive estate walkabout. One big concern was the number of untaxed cars in the car park outside the Springvale Post Office. We would like to remind everyone that all vehicles kept on Council land must be taxed.

Guest speaker at their summer meeting was Matthew Barton, the City Council's Waste Management Officer. He gave an excellent presentation on the hows and whys of recycling. He also explained why only certain plastics are currently collected for recycling. The recycling companies only want certain plastics, the rest not being suitable for any purpose yet. It is also a costly process separating all the different plastics.

Paul Bungey, Chair of the Worthys TA has been invited by County Councillor Jackie Porter to join the Transport Group she has formed to try and find ways to ease some of the traffic problems in and around the Springvale Estate in Kings Worthy.

KEYED OFF

Serco have been having problems with getting void properties back on time due to tenants removing a key or swipe card for their gas or electricity meters. If, when you leave a property, you take your key/swipe card with you, then Serco cannot do the required tests on that property. Even though the key/swipe card is in your name it cannot be used in any other meter as it is only coded to the property where it was first used.

If you are leaving or exchanging properties, would you please leave your key/swipe card for that meter in the kitchen so that Serco can carry out the tests that are required, before the property is re-let. Could you also leave the name of your supplier on a piece of paper with the key/swipe card. You can then inform the electricity/gas supplier that you have now left the property and that the key/card is there for the new tenant. By doing this it would help Serco turn around empty properties on time and help reduce the waiting list.

Thank you for your co-operation.

TACT members Barry Whitfield and Ken Gore, along with Council officers and management of Serco are part of the Serco Project Team. These representatives look after your interests in how the contract that Serco has with the City Council is carried out and deal with the things that go wrong from time to time, trying to get them put right on your behalf.

ALAN STEPS DOWN



*Alan Rickman
with his
Certificate*

John Bond has stepped into the Chair at Weeke Tenants & Residents Association and, at a recent meeting, retiring Chairman Alan Rickman was presented with a certificate of appreciation from the Association. However Alan is still hard at work as TACT Evening Group Chairman and has even taken on new responsibilities. He has been co-opted onto the London & SE Region committee of TPAS, working on behalf of tenants across the south east and he will be reporting on their Isle of Wight conference in the next edition.

SHOULD I MOVE?

Are you living in a property bigger than your present needs? If the answer is yes, is it for one of the following reasons:

- 1.** I have lived here all our married life, but now my husband/wife has died, and I don't really think I could face the hassle of a move. To be honest I wouldn't know where to start looking for a smaller property.
- 2.** I would like to move, but how would I start, and would I be pushed into the first thing that came along?
- 3.** I have no family to help me, so how could I possibly cope? Could I afford the rent and any service charges? I am on housing benefit at the moment - would that alter or, if I move and have more rent to pay, how do I claim housing benefit? (Often it is said, "I have always managed to pay my way, and I don't want any handouts." In many cases, it is what you are entitled to.)

Many tenants, who have made the move into Sheltered Schemes, have said "I wish I had done so earlier, what was I afraid of?"

Living alone and being independent suits some people. Others thrive on company, meeting up with the neighbours in the common room over a cup of coffee, knowing Central Control or a Scheme Manager is just a call away. Still retaining your independence if that is what you want.

Why not contact your Area Housing Manager for more information if you would like to arrange an appointment to talk things over - it could be the best thing you have done for a long time.

CONFERENCE REPORT

The TPAS Annual Conference in Birmingham proved once again to be very busy and interesting. One of the main speakers was Baroness Andrews, Parliamentary Secretary at the Department of Communities and Local Government, who gave an informative and well-presented speech. She outlined the importance of TPAS and tenant involvement, and how tenants play a vital role in achieving sustainable communities and social housing. 'Communities' is now included in the title of the new department, having been long overlooked in the past. She went on to say, "People make up the community and give it a sense of belonging," she said.

"The Government had to invest in people, build trust and commonsense would play a large part. Bring people who feel they have no role to play into the picture. If they won't come to us, go to them through different events, don't wait for them to come to you, for they won't. Things have changed over the years, and change is needed, but some old values need to remain. Patronising tenants is not the way ahead. A priority should be making it possible for people to buy affordable homes. Ensure we all work together to achieve the homes and priorities we want, including affordable rented social housing. We must hand the power to the communities," she said.

At question time I asked Baroness Andrews if it was the Government's plan to phase out council homes? Could the Baroness assure tenants, that the

government will keep council housing?

The Baroness said that Social housing, both through council and housing associations was important. More money had to be invested into council homes and would be. Ruth Kelly was looking into all aspects of housing.

So the future of council housing may not be as bleak as it first looked was the message we got from the Baroness. People have power and must use it in the right way, and that is TACT's intention for the future.

Alan Rickman TACT Chair, Evening Group.



READY FOR THE OFF (from left) David Cruden, Seema Jandu, Alan Rickman, Paul Bungey, Rachel Moreau, Carla Serle and son, James.

TACT GOES INDEPENDENT

Sixteen members of TACT met at the Winnall Community Centre in early September to stage a TACT Independent Day. The idea was that TACT members could talk openly and frankly about the concerns they had, without officers of the City Council or councillors being present.

Discussions took place in a frank and open manner and covered many subjects concerning your worries and indeed your aspirations that TACT can take forward on your behalf. These covered:

- The continuing sale of Housing Revenue Account land.
- The need to urgently restart the Housing Options Appraisal Steering Group.
- Ongoing problems with Serco regarding your Responsive Repairs Maintenance Contract.

- Leaseholder charges – both service and general.
- Updating of the tenants working on your behalf who are members of the various forums and sub-groups.
- How the City Council is dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour.
- The planning behind the Respect Campaign.

Everyone who attended agreed that the Independent Day was a great success and should be organised again.