



## **Housing at the heart of communities**

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The fact that one million tenants in more than a hundred local authorities chose to stick with the council as their landlord, despite being denied funding made available to those transferring to housing associations or going down the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) route, is a testament to the vital role council housing plays at the heart local communities.

And our latest research shows that the faith those tenants placed in their local authority landlord was not misplaced. In fact, councils that retained ownership and management of housing are delivering a range of benefits to communities that go way beyond their traditional housing role.

*Under One Roof: The holistic benefits of retained council housing* demonstrates how stock retained councils are able to add value to economic, social and environmental sustainability as well as delivering services in a joined-up manner. The report is published by the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) and the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) on 25<sup>th</sup> March. It shows how direct ownership and management of housing ties in with planning, community leadership, economic development, tackling homelessness, environmental improvements and a whole host of other local government activities.

Survey results found that tackling anti-social behaviour is the area where direct ownership has greatest impact. This was followed by; community cohesion, efficiency and value for money, community engagement, health and well-being, addressing environmental challenges, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal. The report shows how staff working within a single organisation can liaise more closely when delivering different services to the same individual or family and work in partnership with the police and other agencies. Interviews with tenants also revealed how involvement in decisions about their homes can be a catalyst for engagement in local democracy and involvement in improving other services.

One of the many examples in the report is West Lancashire, where 11% drop in crime has been achieved due to the housing department placing a member of staff in a multi-disciplinary team. Another is Wandsworth, where emergency control, highways, anti-social behaviour, dealing with dangerous dogs, democratic engagement and provision of additional homes have all been enhanced through the council owning and managing its own housing.

While the research analyses the benefits of stock retention, we are by no means suggesting that this should be the only option. We are instead arguing that, where councils directly control properties, there are advantages in terms of being able to join up housing with other local priorities and services. APSE and ARCH have campaigned for stock retainers to have a level playing field with other social housing providers. We have been heartened by opportunities to build new homes for the first time in decades and are looking forward to the reform of the iniquitous housing finance system getting under way and hope the importance of council housing in meeting national economic, social and environmental goals is fully recognised in the next Parliament.

The launch of *Under One Roof* follows last week's report from the Public Accounts Committee, which highlighted that councils opting for the ALMO route or transfer to housing associations received extra funds while stock retainers had to meet the Decent Homes standard out of their own pockets and achieved better value when improving properties.

The holistic benefits described in this APSE and ARCH report have therefore been delivered by retained stock councils despite the odds being stacked against them financially. This surely begs the question of what might be delivered if they councils whose tenants have chosen for their local authority to be their landlord are given the proper control and resources they need.

Copies of Under One Roof: The holistic benefits of retained council housing are available from: [mbaines@apse.org.uk](mailto:mbaines@apse.org.uk) Price £40 non-APSE and ARCH members.

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