

Outcome of Council Housing Transfer Ballot

Submission to the JCF from UNISON and TGWU

Voluntary stock transfer in Salisbury is dead or at least it should be unless mistakes of the past are made again in future. We did inform the Full Council in January 2005 that a ballot was unwinnable and this indeed proved to be the case. A future Government may end transfer ballots but that would be a breach of faith with tenants and undemocratic act that would be opposed strongly by many including ourselves.

We know that the problem for local council housing is the £6 million that is retained by the Government each year from local rent receipts. All sides we think can agree on that. The housing finance system introduced by a previous Government and continued by the current one works against council housing, tenant choice and is unfair. With £18 million per year for council housing in Salisbury the stock could be maintained at a high standard for many years.

Why should tenants and staff be blackmailed by current Government Policy into having to support transfer? We know that some of our members supported stock transfer reluctantly with the threat of job losses hanging over their heads. But such support was not enthusiastic and on a level playing field almost all would prefer to remain with the Council. This fact and the recent ballot by tenants should give Salisbury District Council confidence that they are doing something right. Instead of viewing the ballot result as a defeat and a 'sad day' Salisbury District Councillors from all sides must seize the moment, put the battles of the past behind them and get full square behind their tenants and council housing. As such we think it is vitally important that as a way forward that Salisbury District Council signals a new way forward to it's tenants. It must do all it can to join others in getting a change in the current housing finance system we have in the moment that puts pressure on Councils, tenants and staff to seek to transfer to get the same treatment as Housing Associations. UNISON and TGWU would like to see the Council state that it is committed to retaining Council Housing in this area and that it believes retained council housing is desirable.

We request that the Council formally come out in favour of the fourth option for housing investment which would put councils on a level playing field with Housing Associations.

We request that the Council write to the relevant Government Minister calling on them to allow tenants in Salisbury to receive the £6 million in rents currently kept by the Government and that the fourth option be granted.

We request that the Council and Councillors join with tenants and unions in continuing to actively lobby Government and MPs such as Robert Key to support direct investment in council housing.

We call on the Council to join the best practice and lobbying organization called the Association of Retained Council Housing.

Information about ARCH –

“The overall aim of the Association is to act as a Forum to provide mutual support to those local authorities who have chosen to retain ownership and management of council housing. In particular the Association seeks to:

- lobby Government for a sustainable long term financial strategy to support residents choice for the retention of Council housing in local authority ownership and management,
- share good practice and exemplify the successes and long term benefits of local authority ownership and management,
- champion the concept of a comprehensive housing service and the integral role of retention of the housing stock to local authorities strategic and enabling role.
- promote opportunities for collaborative working and joint commissioning of services and policy development to support the objectives of stock retention.

The Association was set up in 2005 and in 2005 the initial membership fee is about £1000. Annual membership is, we believe, based on a pro-rata charge of costs. 44 Councils agreed to join ARCH when it was launched and others have done so since 2005. It is non-Party Political with Councillors from different political persuasions being involved. In 2005 the Vice Chair was a Conservative from Wandsworth.

We request that this paper be attached to the minutes from the JCF that goes to the subsequent meeting of the Cabinet.