

# CAMDEN DEFEND COUNCIL HOUSING

## Say NO to ALMOs

**No one can seriously doubt that this government's agenda is to privatise council housing.**

They have sold off council homes faster than even the Tories dared. Their last election manifesto had a target of transferring 200,000 homes a year for ten years.

Their trouble is that tenants in most of the big city councils won't stand it - that's why they have come up with Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs).

ALMOs are a two-stage strategy for privatising our homes. Setting up the private company to manage housing - putting as much distance between the new company and the council as possible - will clearly make it easier to come back and

argue full privatisation is necessary.

The bribe is that councils who go ALMO will get extra money. But the question no one can answer is why if there is now extra money for ALMOs this cannot be given to councils direct as tenants are demanding - unless of course privatisation is their end game.

Some councillors and senior housing managers assure us that ALMOs are not privatisation. The fact is that Camden council tried to push through stock transfer in 1997 using the same argument that there was 'no alternative'. We proved them wrong five years ago. Most homes have had new windows and other major works. Assurances today just aren't dependable - whether or not you believe the council is sincere.

Ministers are trying to look determined to convince tenants that stock transfer, PFI or ALMOs is the only future. But in June Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott was forced to concede in Parliament "we will try to provide adequate funding for those who want to stay with local authorities."

It shows that despite their attempt to tough it out they are feeling the pressure.

Council housing is worth defending - for us and our children. By building a united campaign across the country involving tenants, trade unions, MPs and councillors we can win direct investment in council housing with no strings attached.

Together we can stop the ALMO and win a secure long term future for council housing for all who need it.

### **The ALMO is not inevitable - we can stop it**

Camden council want tenants to believe that the ALMO is inevitable.

But Camden tenants have a proud record of refusing to roll over. We stopped stock transfer in 1998, we stopped the Housing Action Trusts in 1988, we fought against the Housing Finance Act in 1972. Where would we be now if we had given in before?

Camden council has now been forced to agree that all tenants will be balloted in November on whether we want an ALMO. But this hasn't stopped them trying to bring it in by the back door.

They have just held elections for a Shadow Board of directors to run the company in an attempt to pre-empt the November ballot. But the vast majority of tenants tore up their ballot papers. Only 12% voted for a candidate and nearly 20% of those who voted wrote 'No to ALMOs' on their ballot paper. The Shadow Board has no credibility and the council is embarrassed.

They want to try and re-organise the housing department to bring it into line with an ALMO but are facing massive opposition from tenants associations across Camden.

Now they have employed consultants to try and sell ALMOs to tenants. Aldbourne Associates call themselves an 'Independent Tenants Friend'. But paid by the council they are neither independent, tenants or our friends.

According to *Social Housing* magazine 'fees of the army of consultants, surveyors, solicitors and advisers accounted for most of the £65 million transfer costs' last year. It's a gravy train. This money should be spent on our homes instead!

The ALMO is not inevitable. They will try and blackmail tenants as they did in 1997. They wouldn't dare ignore us if we make sure enough tenants hear the arguments and vote 'No to ALMO'.

### **THIS CAMPAIGN NEEDS YOUR HELP**

Unlike the council we can't use tenants rents to pay to get the argument across against ALMO.

We rely on tenants and trade union members in the housing department to give out leaflets in their spare time whilst the council pays a private distribution company and plans to put senior housing managers on a bus going around estates.

**We need you to help:**

- organise a meeting in your area
- get this leaflet through every door
- put up posters
- make a donation to fund the campaign

# WE ALL WANT IMPROVEMENTS - BUT WITHOUT THE RISK OF PRIVATISATION

We all want improvements to our homes but we are not prepared to bow to blackmail and suffer the effects of privatisation - just because some politicians want to get rid of council housing.

Nationally council tenants pay more than enough in rent to cover day to day repairs, housing management and major improvements. The problem is that the government robs housing rent accounts - and then they have the cheek to put conditions on giving us our own money back! If they are prepared to give an ALMO extra money why can't they give it direct to Camden council as our landlord for them to do the improvement direct?

The council is trying to scare tenants that if we don't accept an ALMO then our homes will all apart. This is rubbish. Most council homes in Camden are in a fairly good state. The council's own reports shows that they have millions to spend over the next 30 years without an ALMO.

The government has introduced a new 'Decent Homes Target'. Camden now says that it won't have enough money to meet all the targets for every home by 2010 - the government's deadline. But their own Housing Business Plan last year showed that nearly 2/3rds of homes would meet the target on time in full and the remainder would get all the improvements only a few years late. The council now says that their figures were wrong. That's convenient! But even if the gap is bigger it is still clear that there is enough money without an ALMO for all the homes in greatest need to be done and most of the others.

What this debate comes down to is that the council is desperate to meet a government target (and get more awards and brownie points). This shouldn't be our priority. Anyway we all know that government targets change and timescales slip.

Going ALMO is just not worth the risk!

## Camden used the same blackmail tactics in 1997

Five years ago Camden threatened tenants that if we didn't accept stock transfer there would be no major repairs and improvements to our homes.

This is what their 'New Opportunities' document argued at the time. They would "strive to keep homes safe, warm and dry, but little more. Major repairs and renovation projects... would be unaffordable... Overall, the condition of our housing stock would gradually get worse. Most people would continue to be forced to wait a long time for even modest improvements."

They deliberately painted a bleak picture in 1997 to blackmail tenants to accept selling off our homes as the only alternative. Today they are using exactly the same argument to try and get us to accept ALMOs.

## It's time that politicians represent the interests of the people who elect them - not just tell us what the government wants to do.

Get copies of the campaign postcard for yourself, friends and neighbours. Send them to your MP and local councillors to tell them what you think and urge them to support our campaign.

**ALMO IS TWO-STAGE PRIVATISATION OF COUNCIL HOUSING. SUPPORT OUR CAMPAIGN FOR DIRECT INVESTMENT - WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED.**

**Defend Council Housing**

**THE FUTURE OF COUNCIL HOUSING IS AT STAKE. WE WANT TO KNOW WHERE CAMDEN'S MPs STAND.**

Dear Frank/Glenda, Do you agree:

- Yes/No The government is trying to blackmail tenants to accept stock specific PFI or ALMOs to get repairs and improvements?
- Yes/No The government has extra money for ALMOs. There is no good reason why it can't allow the council to delay that?
- Yes/No Council housing is a cost effective way of providing shelter and all those who are priced out by the private market?
- Yes/No Council housing is the Housing Regulator of Foundation Hospitals in the NHS which you support?
- Yes/No Council housing is a cost effective way of providing shelter and all those who are priced out by the private market?
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**Camden tenants Say NO to ALMO**

## NATIONAL CAMPAIGN IS PUTTING GOVERNMENT UNDER PRESSURE

The council repeatedly tells us that the government's mind is made up and there will be no more money for direct investment in council housing. Well despite the pessimism of councillors the government has been forced to make concessions. Camden has benefited from one of the biggest capital improvements schemes over the last few years with many homes getting new windows and other major works.

Last year Ministers conceded a new 'right to borrow' for councils to allow them to raise money for improvements. Now they are under pressure to provide the revenue stream offered to ALMOs to end discrimination against council housing.

Around the country tenants and trade unionists are organising just like we are in Camden.

123 MPs have signed a motion in Parliament backing our demands. Together we can win much more.

## WHY WE SAY ALMO IS TWO-STAGE PRIVATISATION

Interviewed in *Inside Housing* magazine the Wendy Jarvis, head of local authority housing finance at the ODPM, was asked about letting ALMOs act like housing associations. She said: "[ALMOs] don't own their stock at the moment. The housing

association model is an obvious one to look at and we are looking at it... Our views has to be that it [ALMO] stays within the Whitehall family until we have formulated our own views and particularly the Treasury is comfortable. Then we will go out to the relevant private sector partners."

It's clear what they have in mind!

**Defend Council Housing**

**NO TO ALMOs**

**Say NO to privatisation**

Unlike the council's pro ALMO campaign our activity is not funded by tenants rents but from donations by individual tenants, Tenants Associations and UNISON. We can't afford flashy material or hire a distribution company - we need your help getting leaflets through doors and putting up posters.

For more information and to help the campaign PHONE 020 7419 4923 WRITE Camden DCH c/o 42 Aborfield, Peckwater Estate, London NW5 2UD WEBSITE [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk) EMAIL [camden@defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](mailto:camden@defendcouncilhousing.org.uk)