If the government has extra money for ALMOs why can't they give it to the council direct?

Their agenda is privatisation.

Don't take the first step—VOTE NO to ALMO

Resist the blackmail

CAMDEN TRIED THE SAME BLACKMAIL 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.

Their "New Opportunities" document argued at the time that all they could do was just "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."

Well since 1997 Camden has had a big investment programme benefiting many tenants. The council's predictions were wrong.

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



Protest at town hall after

A strong, independent tenants' movement with tenants' associations on every estate and street is a much more effective defence of tenants' interests than a hand-

VOTE NO

Some material is available in

Sylheti, Somali, Greek, Chinese

and French—help translate

For posters, postcards, more

copies of this broadsheet or

other information ring us on

7419 4923 or 7209 0197.

ful of board members.

THEY PROMISED

RAIL AND TUBE

PRIVATISATION

WOULDN'T AFFECT

SAFETY.

HANDS OFF OUR

It is wrong that the council is family, friends and neighbours using our rents to pay for its and get them to pro-ALMO campaign (glossy brochures, mailshots to all tenants, information vans, colour press adverts, show flats, staff

We have to rely on donations from tenants' associations, Unison (the trade union representing council workers), individual contributions and fundraising to put the case against.

If you agree there should be a fair debate:

Distribute this broadsheet to every council home

Put up posters on your estate and in your area

Organise a meeting and invite a DCH speaker to debate with the council so all tenants can hear both sides of the argument Raise money to pay for the campaign

Most important... talk to your

Council propoganda dishonest

Camden council are pumping dishonestly suggesting that new kitchens and bathrooms are dependent on going ALMO.

Even their revised Business Plan calculations—now £338 million (see inside page for why they keep changing their figures) makes it clear

political views, we

must stand togethe

l make a last appea

leader of the council

before you all build a

Chair, Hardington &

How cheaply can

Camden Citizen says

being able to cook in

shower in a modern

bathroom would be

exaggerating a tiny

wee bit the impact

cupboards will have

you be bought?

The prospect of

kitchen, or take a

a stylish, fitted

Aren't they just

new kitchen

on our lives?

a dream.

to defeat this idea.

to the chair of

housing and the

to drop this idea

neap of trouble.

Eddie O'Dwyer,

Belmont TA

that the council will have a substantial capital programme without the ALMO.

Many tenants will get a new kitchen and bathroom even if we vote no (we might not get the tacky plastic bowls and towels in their photographs). Replacement will just take longer.

If the council isn't prepared to be open and honest on this issue what else can we trust them on?

FOUNDATION "Now I want to call upon all tenants in **HOSPITALS:** Camden to unite under one banner. Regardless of your

Homes

Arms-Length Management for the NHS

Local MPs Frank Dobson and Glenda Jackson are opposed to Foundation Hospitals part of the government's drive to privatise our public services.

They have argued that the government case for Foundation Hospitals is nonsense and dangerous and will undermine the NHS.

Foundation Hospitals are being promoted along the same lines as ALMOs. Ministers argue freedom from Whitehall control will improve services—they will act as 'public benefit corporations' run by boards of 'local stakeholders' and will be "not-for-profit". Does that sound familiar?

Councillors and MPs should recognise that ALMOs are the housing equivalent of Foundation Hospitals. They both seek to use a new company to break public control and accountability and pave the way for the private sector to take over.

We need to defend the principle of decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing alongside a secure National Health

YOUR VOTE COUNTS

MOST TENANTS don't vote in

IN THIS BALLOT EVERY **VOTE COUNTS.**

If the majority of tenants

VOTE NO we can stop the ALMO
and send a clear message to

CAMDEN TENANTS WANT 'DIRECT INVESTMENT IN COUNCIL HOUSING—WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED'

Council workers oppose the ALMO too

Unison members who work in the council can see the dangers of an ALMO. We are fearful that it will lead to a new "company culture" and become more and more distant from the council ideal of providing a comprehensive local service.

Arms length companies that have taken over running Leisure and Social Services, in other parts of the country, have led to privatisation. An ALMO will create a new layer of highly paid senior managers usually paid for by cutting frontline staff.

Council promises that workers won't lose out are nonsense. Just ask anyone who has been TUPE transferred from the council, NHS, rail or other public services.

This will lead to more staff demoralisation and higher turnover, which affects the services tenants receive.

Most of us have chosen to work for the council because we want to provide an important public service. Many of us are council tenants ourselves. Everyone living in London knows how important council housing is, for this and future generations.

An ALMO won't just affect housing staff. Workers in other council departments such as Legal and Information Technology will suffer if central services are outsourced to private contractors.

That's why Camden Unison members

are 100 percent with tenants in oppos-

ing the ALMO. We are determined to

The council's Housing News (August 2003) only promises "almost 15,000 homes will have a new kitchen and/or bathroom" Once again they are delib-

They call it "choice" but

Camden's 'information' to

erately misleading tenants and not telling us the truth. If their programme goes over budget (as many do) or

T'S NOT WORTH THE RISK

An ALMO for Camden: Show homes open They won't.

COUNCIL BRIBERY—

the government cuts spendchoice/



ing on ALMOs, even fewer tenants would actually get what they expected. We'd still be stuck with the ALMO!

The council hides the fact that Camden's existing resources—without an ALMO—will cover much of the promised work. They are desperate to

get another award and don't want to embarrass the government.

October 2003

against privatisation of council hous- pressure tomorrow? ing but only five years ago they wanted Opportunities"!

accepted their advice in 1997 we wouldn't pany managing our homes. be council tenants today.

tion (see inside).

ing management from the council, get a new private company in place and put discouncil then it will be easier to sell our homes later.

We're expected to believe their assurances that they would never do this. But their past record—and their refusal to campaign against government policy today— they are listening to ordinary people. makes this hard to rely on.

Who is confident that the same councillors who tell us there is "no alternative" no strings attached. Vote No.

Camden Council claims that it is would stand up to further government

CAMDEN DEFEND COUNCIL HOUSING

Council housing is worth defending. The to sell off our homes and called it "New council is far from brilliant but it's a better landlord than most. We pay our rent and Both times they have denied it has got we have a right to expect a decent seranything to do with privatisation. If we'd vice—not blackmail to accept a new com-

For years governments have told us there The government and council are now is no money for improvements. Suddenly pushing ALMOs because they know that there is plenty of money—but only if we tenants in areas like Camden won't accept accept ALMOs. This "new" money comes stock transfer. ALMOs have been devel- from tenants' rents. Ask yourself: why can't oped as a two-stage strategy to privatisa- the government give the extra money to the council direct—as tenants are demanding— They hope that if they can separate hous- unless they have a privatisation agenda?

Camden has sufficient resources to do all the most urgent work to our estates and tance between the new company and the provide many new kitchens and bathrooms. Most tenants would rather it took a bit longer than face the risks attached to ALMOs.

Our campaigning has already forced concessions from the government. Now Ministers are under increasing pressure to show

We can win much more. We can win direct investment in council housing with

8 REASONS TO REJECT ALMOS

This government wants to privatise council housing—ALMOs are a key part of their strategy

Camden can afford to do all the urgent repairs and improvements without going ALMO. There is no need to take the risk!

Elected councillors will no longer be accountable for what happens to our homes. It's a recipe for excuses

A separate private company means less coordination between housing and other services—when we need

Tenants on the board will not be allowed to represent our interests—their hands will be tied by company

Massive amounts will be spent on consultants, reorganisation and higher senior managers' pay

Housing workers will lose out by being TUPE transferred. Staff turnover and demoralisation will affect the service

Winning direct investment without strings is worth fighting for. We've already won concessions. We can win much more!

publication has been certified FREE FROM **ADDED PROFIT** No highly paid consultants, senior

This broadsheet was entirely written by council tenants with the financial help of the Camden UNISON union.

Camden, on top of spending our rent on council publications promoting the ALMO, have also employed consultants to promote their plans.

Aldbourne Associates call themselves an "Independent Tenants' Friend". But paid by the council they are neither "independent", "tenants" or our "friends".

This isn't a fair and balanced debate! Ask yourself—Why not?

tenants is just a onesided, hard-sell marketing campaign. They are dishonestly exaggerating the benefits of ALMOs by suggesting that every tenant will get a new kitchen and bathroom.

managers or ambitious Tell councillors: Defending politicians have been involved in this council housing is the main broadsheet priority for Camden council tenants!

TWO-STAGE PRIVATISATION OF COUNCIL HOUSING

Deer Councilion (by toy and general control of the council of the Camden tenants Say NO to ALMO

SEND A POSTCARD!

Defend Council Housing

It's time that politicians represent the interests of the people who elect them—not just tell us what the government wants us

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.

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP Thanks to the tenants on all these estates who have helped by delivering broadsheets and putting up posters. Please make sure that every tenant gets to read

this new broadsheet. If you want help to do your area get in touch.

Agar Grove Ampthill Square Artisan Dwellings Barnfield/Woodfield Bavham Place Bourne Estate Broadfield & Fairhurst Brunswick Estate Bury Place

Camden Square Area

Cavford House

Chalcots Estate

Clarence Way CRAB Denton **Dudley House Durdans House** Gamages Godwin & Crowndale Gospel Oak 7&8 Hardington & Belmont Highgate Newtown

Holly Lodge

Ingestre Rd

Langdon House Lissenden Gardens Ludham & Waxham Maiden Lane Maitland Park Millman Ct Monmouth Hse & Alpha Ct 8 Newton Street Peckwater Estate Primrose Hill Court Red Lion

Regents Square

Rowstock

fight this together.

Camden Unison

Templar House Torriano Estate Tybalds Close Wendling Estate Wells House Westcroft Estate Widford/Heybridge/Roxwell Willingham/Kenistoun

Sidney Boyd Court

South Hampstead Housing

St Pancras Way Co-Op

Camden DCH c/o 42 Aborfield, Peckwater Estate, London NW5 2UD PHONE 7419 4923 WEBSITE www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk EMAIL camden@defendcouncilhousing.org.uk Thanks to Camden for sponsoring this broadsheet so tenants hear the case against ALMOs

THE GOVERNMENT'S REAL AGENDA

This government is clearly committed to privatisation of public services.

The effect of tube and rail privatisation is in the news almost daily. There is a revolt amongst many Labour MPs against Foundation Hospitals and new private walk-in clinics. Parents and students are outraged at plans to introduce top-up fees at universities. Many government departments and local authority services—like school meals, grounds

maintenance and parking in Camden—are run by private contractors.

The government's last election manifesto included a target of selling off 200,000 council homes a year each year until 2010.

The trouble for Ministers is that housing privatisation has proved much more difficult than expected—that's because tenants around the country have been getting organised and

Ministers now recognise that stock transfer won't get through in many areas. That's why they have dusted off the Tories' original ALMO formula.

They hope that if they can get the private company managing our homes it will be easier to complete the privatisation in a second stage.

If you are opposed to the government's privatisation agenda don't let them take the first step.

Vote No to ALMO

THE ALTERNATIVE TO ALMO

National campaign gaining ground

pay more than enough in rent to cover day to day repairs, housing management and major

The problem is that the government robs housing rent accounts—and then they have the cheek to put conditions on giving us our own monev back!

demanding direct investment without strings. All over Britain tenants are opposing stock transfer,

KEEP PRESCOTT TO HIS WORD

Deputy prime minister John Prescott gave this commitment in parliament on 18 June: "We will try to provide adequate funding for those who want to stay with local authorities."

Camden council should be supporting tenants in making sure the deputy prime minister keeps his word—not letting him off the hook.

three favoured options). Many of the biggest trade unions are part of the campaign (UNISON, TGWU, GMB, UCATT, RMT, Amicus-MSF, GPMU). 127 MPs have now supported our demands and for the first time a "Council Housing" group has been formed in parliament to raise the campaign's profile. Together we are

a force to be reckoned with. This pressure has already won concessions. Councils, from next April, have a new "right to borrow" as a method of financing major

The pressure is on Ministers to provide a revenue stream to councils direct as an alternative to stock transfer, PFI or ALMOs.

The biggest question the government have been unable to answer is why, if there is now extra money for ALMOs, they can't give it to councils direct?

With stock tranfer already discredited, if Camden tenents reject ALMOs it will increase the preasure on ministers to agree

-STOP PRESS-**MPs TO QUESTION INVESTMENT**

OPTIONS

Senior MPs are adding to the pressure on John Prescott. The Parliamentary Select Committee of MPs who scrutinise Prescott's office of the deputy prime minister have ust announced a new enquiry following their damning report on stock transfer. This one will will make recomendations on the "decent homes target", stock options available to councils and look at "tenants

choice" Andrew Bennet MP. the committee chair, called for direct investment in council nousing at the campaign's mass lobby of parliament in

Pressure like this can win investment in council housing without an ALMO.

Conflict of Interest

We can stop the ALMO —but every vote counts...

believe that the ALMO is inevitable. But Don't you think there is a conflict of that's not true. Government rules require terest when the senior managers who the council to demonstrate that tenants re pushing for an ALMO are likely to support setting up the new company. penefit personally from pay rises if the new Councillors accept it would be political suicide if they ignore the ballot result.

Camden council would like tenants to

They can't do this if we vote "no".

They have refused repeated calls by

question on the ballot paper! This has al-

ready been condemned by the chairs and

vice-chairs of Camden Town, Gospel Oak

and Kentish Town district nanagement com-

mittees (representing tenants in their dis-

It's not the first time that Camden ten-

JUNKMAIL?

ants have had to defend council housing.

JUST BLACKMAIL.

tricts) and many other TA reps.

SEPERATE COMPANY

It makes no sense to create a separate

"housing company". It will make "joined

up thinking" more difficult when housing

managers are following a separate

"I have severe doubts about the

concept of ALMOs. I would oppose

them as the slippery slope towards

privatisation of all council housing.

I am convinced that ALMOs will

lead to the loss of control of those

representatives will no longer have

housing cases. I shall vote against

any such decision to adopt ALMOs

homes by local authorities and

any way to seek resolution of

Councillor Roger Robinson St

Pancras and Somers Town ward

with more votes than all the rest of the

have demanded input into the ALMO

far has just reinforced my fears of how

Albert Beale, tenant shadow

powerless tenant directors are."

I was elected as an anti-ALMO candidate

candidates in my district put together. Since

consultation process. We've been continually

excluded from this. My whole experience so

board member for Holborn district

the election, tenants on the shadow board

'company agenda'.

on the council."

Older tenants will remem-

ber the big fight in

tricks to try and win.

their case.

1960. There was a massive campaign to The council is so worried they will lose stop the Tories' Housing Finance Act in the the vote they are resorting to undemocratic 1970s and their Housing Action Trusts in

In 1997 we had to organise meetings on tenant reps for a fair and balanced debate our estates and lobby the town hall to stop with equal resources for both sides to put this council selling off our homes.

We wouldn't be council tenants today if They now even plan to ask a loaded we had allowed them to bully us in the past and not stood up for our interests.

Camden is trying to make out that its housing is in a desperate state and the ALMO money is critical. But most estates have recently had capital works pro-

Camden has resources to carry out all the most urgent work on estates—without an ALMO. Voting No to ALMO would simply mean that homes in least need of work might have to wait longer.

Everyone knows that government policy changes all the time. The worst of all possibilities is that we get stuck with an ALMO but the extra funding is cut. An ALMO in financial crisis would be the perfect excuse to push through selling off our homes.

The government needs tenants' support. We can win the argument for direct investment without strings. That way the council could carry out all the work itself and we wouldn't have taken a big step towards pri-

Going ALMO really isn't worth the risk.



Tenants in Somers Town saying NO to ALMO on one of the campaign stalls

Camden's own finances are substantial

In April of this year Camden council presented a distorted picture of its investment need to tenants, in order to justify their political decision to set up an

They tried to claim that if we don't say yes to ALMO, we would have to "stay as we are" or "do nothing". But as we pointed out, according to the council's own business plan, the work required to meet 90 percent of the decent homes standard by 2010 can be done using our own resources.

The council's financial experts admitted that our analysis was

"At the time the business plan was written—between April and June 2002, this was the council's best estimate of our ability to achieve the decent homes standard. It also reflects

a real desire not to distort or overestimate the need for extra resources." Within the space of a week, the

mysteriously changed. The original estimate was that 18,800 homes failed the Decent Homes standard (out of a total of 25,000). On 28 April 2003 tenant representatives were presented with an updated figure "calculated using the new stock condition data" of 16,525 non-decent homes; meaning the council's own resources could stretch even further.2

After campaigners pointed out the serious discrepancy between the business plan and the council's glossy propaganda, the number of homes needing work rose to 21,275. This was also described

as "based on the results of the new stock condition data".3 How convenient! It's difficult to know which figures to trust. However, 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

If we include the possibilities raised by the new prudential borrowing opportunities, then the gap between our own resources and the ALMOs will be even smaller. Camden's financial arguments don't make going ALMO worth the risk! SOURCES

1 Letter from Catherine Illingworth, Head of Investment Strategy, to Templar House TRA, 23 June 2003 2 Round 3 ALMO Bid—Draft, presented to

Joint DMC Meeting 28 April 2003

'Decent Homes': a moving target?

The council argues that meeting the government's "Decent Homes Target" is the priority. But many big city councils don't expect to meet this target including Birmingham and Liverpool

Liverpool council was reported as saying, "We believe there needs to be some flexibility from government." Why isn't Camden

saying the same? Inside housing reported (25 July 2003) that some senior managers

percieved fixation with numbers. fearing that repetition of pasr mistakes might result from the rush to achieve targets"

Significantly, Sarah Webb, now Director of Policy at the Chartered Institute of Housing, thinks there could be a case for exemptions from the deadline: "If you show that in your particular circumstance you have got a reason for arguing it should take a

were "alarmed at the government's bit longer then maybe we should listen," she said. Council tenants voting no to ALMO would be a clear reason! Many government targets

> quietly fall by the wayside or get changed under pressure. Many just disappear altogether. It is ridiculous for Camden council to put meeting a

government target before the long term interests of council

Tenants lose power under ALMO

MAKES NO SENSE The council claims that Hiving off housing into a separate company will make cooperation across having tenants on the council departments more difficult. board of directors will Housing has a direct effect on our give tenants more power. health and our children's education. This is a con!

At the moment individual tenants and tenants' associations can lobby their local ward councillors and as Sheffield tenants did at the last election—vote them out.

The ALMO board setup gives us a few token tenants, but they will be in a minority and their hands will be tied by company law. Along with the five councillors on the board they will be told they have a legal responsibility to the new company—not to represent our views.

Tenants who sit on housing association boards often find they are gagged. If they dare to speak out for the interests of tenants, they are kicked off the board.

Ward councillors will have the ALMO and say there is nothing they can do.

the perfect excuse to blame This isn't tenants' power.

n reality, under an ALMO

senior managers will

exercise even more power. The recent elections to the shadow board of directors shows what a nonsense it is. Tenants were asked to vote for a candidate without knowing who they were. We were told we couldn't even

ask the candidates questions in a public forum—because material. they might feel intimidated. These are the people who would be entrusted with making important decisions on our behalf. A strong, independent

tenants' movement with every estate and street and coordination across districts through the district management committees is a much more effective defence of tenants' interests

It's no suprise then that the council is trying to bypass and undermine the DMCs and individual TAs. They plan to use 5 tenant

board members as an alternative to consulting TA reps. Having a board of directors will centralise power and make it more remote and less accountable—not more.

Counting the cost of the ALMO

The Director of Housing estimates that setting up the ALMO will cost £300.000.

That seems low considering what they have spent already on consultants' fees, senior managers' time and glossy

Most ALMOs have been quick to give senior managers big pay rises. Leeds spent an extra £1 million on managers alone. Ashfield's ALMO cost £2 million to set up. Westminster spent £67,000 on a video. It's outrageous.

All the existing ALMOs have spent tenants rents on new corporate images and logosmoney which could have been used for repairs!

Camden council also admit that the ALMO will cost at least £400,000 extra a year just to cover the legal and financial costs of running a separate company. They suggest that savings would need to be made to meet pressures on the Housing Revenue Account.

The proposed restructure of the Housing Repairs department, with a top heavy well-salaried tier of management and pruning and thinning of frontline staff, is an indication of the kind of savings

residents and staff can expect. A report published in July by the

council's finance department reveals how setting up an ALMO might not only cost council tenants more but could cost all council tax payers in Camden a fortune, too. The report, to the council's

Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 29 July 2003, admitted that "the effect of restructuring the department to reflect the strategic / operational split may have an impact on both General Fund and HRA [housing] budgets".

Cllr John Mills, the council's finance chief, raised serious concerns about the effect that an ALMO in housing would have on the rest of the council. The housing department shares other council services like office accomodation, legal, personnel, finance, etc.

Other ALMOs are now looking at oursourcing these (another example of privatisation coming in through the back door).

We've already seen what privatisation of parking, school meals and other services has meant. Under an ALMO. caretaking and district staff could be next.

It's clear what they plan...

Camden claim that there is no hidden privatisation agenda but read on...

THE CIVIL SERVANT...

Wendy Jarvis, the head of local authority housing finance in John Prescott's office, was asked, 'Why not just let ALMOs operate like housing associations?' She replied: 'The housing association model is an obvious one to look at and we are looking at it...If you go to the City too soon, they won't be interested, they need something tangible...Our view has to be that it stays within the Whitehall family until we have formulated our own views and particularly that the Treasury is comfortable. Then we will go out to the relevant private sector partners." (Inside Housing. 13 June 2003)

THE BANKER...

Peter Williams, deputy director general of the Council of Mortgage Lenders, April 2002 "We now need to look at bringing in private finance into ALMOs. ALMOs could also be used as a transition vehicle for disengaging from the local authority control in

THE CONSULTANT...

PriceWaterhouse Coopers report to Haringey council "The consultants recommend that

the council should consider an alternative [an ALMO] which meets its shorter term objectives but which is compatible with achieving full stock transfer in the longer term.'

THE TRADE ORGANISATION...

Gordon Perry, now chair of the National Federation of ALMOs, (Housing Today 4 April 2003) "if you are a council who thinks ALMO is an easy, no-change option that keeps the council in control, you are wrong."

...AND CAMDEN COUNCIL ITSELF...

Round 3 ALMO Bid, Para 5.1 "We believe that establishing the ALMO offers us an opportunity to enter a more dynamic phase of partnership with local housing associations, working together as providers of social housing with the council as a strategic body for all. The housing department will facilitate bringing together initiatives between associations and the ALMO."

TWO STAGE

MODERNISATION

OF HOUSING STOCK

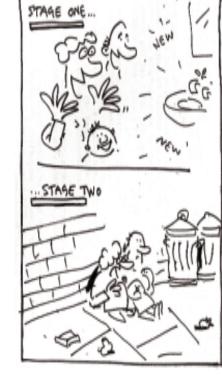
Council too quick to give in

has said in Inside Camden (a staff publication), "The govenment has made it abundantly clear that there are no other options open to us." Executive Member for Housing, Councillor Charlie Hedges, said to tenants reps on 28 April, "At the end of the day the government wants us to meet the Decent Homes Target 100 percent and that's what matters."

For the new Chief Executive, Moira Gibb, commitment to council housing is questionable. She glibly says, "I believe there is no one model which is the 'right'

The council gives in too easily to a bit of pressure from

If they are not prepared to fight for direct investment today do you have confidence they would resist pressure from ministers to complete the process of privatising our homes once an ALMO is set up?



What is an ALMO?

An Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) is a new private company setup to manage our homes. A board of directors including tenants, councillors and "independents" will run the company. At the start the council will own the company and we will remain as council tenants.

This whole debate is about how long this situation will last. Our argument is that setting up the ALMO company makes it easier for the government to get their way and privatise our homes completely—and that's what they want to do.