

Defend Council Housing

May 2007



Tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs Demand 'Fourth Option' to improve existing and build new council homes

Reports that "Gordon Brown is ready to launch a new era of council house building" (*Daily Mirror*, May 2nd, 2007) are great news. At last a government that listens to the people.



by Austin Mitchell MP, chair, House of Commons Council Housing group

We all want to end the bullying and blackmailing of tenants and elected councillors, turn the page, and usher in a new era of first class public housing fit for the 21st century.

The 'Fourth Option' demanded by Labour's conference three years running would benefit tenants across the UK. On behalf of tenants, councillors, trade unions and others in

200 authorities with council housing, let's get on with it!

All of us will welcome a fresh approach, based on genuine choice for tenants with a level playing field on borrowing against rents and on debt write-off. The case for investment

in council housing, funded by ring fencing all the money from rents and receipts is based on sound finance: an end to squandering of public funds to subsidise privatisation and private landlords.

Council housing has a key part to play in addressing Britain's growing housing need. The new and improved council homes will reduce waiting lists and make council estates once again the mixed communities they were until acute shortage distorted allocations policies.

This is a chance for government to show it's listening to the people



and to honour the manifesto commitment, that "By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities".

Governments that break promises don't get re-elected. By completing improvements to all existing council homes and starting a new council house building programme, politicians can feel proud to deliver, government will achieve targets on housing but also raising standards on health and education and council tenants will be proud once again of their homes and communities.



Come to the DCH National Conference:

STAND UP FOR COUNCIL HOUSING

Thursday 12th July 2007, TUC, Congress House, Central London

see back page for full details >>

Step up pressure to win

A campaign of sustained opposition to privatisation of council housing from tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs, and 'market forces' failing to meet housing need, has concentrated minds at the highest level of government.

The case for the 'Fourth Option' – investment to improve existing council homes and estates and enable local authorities to start a new council house building programme – makes more sense than ever.

Tenants have been voting NO to privatisation in more ballots than ever before. Housing was a major issue in many areas in the May 3rd elections and the Mayor of London's latest survey showed housing top of people's priorities.

Decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing has served millions well. Council housing is cheaper to build, manage and maintain than the alternatives and is more accountable. Nearly three million council tenants across the UK expect government to meet its Manifesto commitment that our homes will be improved by 2010. Any change in deadline or priorities, will have to be by mutual consent.

'FOURTH OPTION' FOR COUNCIL HOUSING

1. Enable local authorities to improve all existing council homes and estates
2. Allow local authorities to start a new council house building programme
3. Ensure that local authorities have sufficient revenue to maintain all council homes in future years

The 'Fourth Option' would be welcomed by tenants, trade unionists, councillors and MPs in nearly 200 local authority areas across England, Scotland and Wales including 'retaining' authorities, ALMOs where tenants don't want two-stage privatisation, where tenants have rejected transfer and those yet to decide. All need changes to the existing housing finance regime to secure a long term financial future for council housing as an alternative to privatisation.

And more than 1.6 million households on council housing waiting lists (as well as local councillors) in almost every authority in Britain want councils to build a new generation of first class council homes.

The financial case for the 'Fourth Option' has been made. Improvements to existing council homes and estates

can be funded from the money government siphons out of tenants' rents each year, combined with the income from 'Right to Buy' and transfer receipts, equal treatment on debt write-off and stopping gap funding to subsidise privatisation and savings on expensive consultants. The Treasury could then switch from funding rising Housing Benefit bills that benefit private landlords to investment in council housing.

Local authorities could build a new generation of first class council homes if government provided a 'level playing field', allowing local authorities to borrow against rental income to fund investment and access grants from the Housing Corporation like other landlords.

New and improved council housing would provide desperately needed homes and open up allocations policy

once again. Council estates can return to being mixed communities where young and old, single, families, working and non-working tenants live side by side with pride. Tenants would again be able to move as their lives and needs change.

Tenants are sick of being bullied and blackmailed to accept privatisation. A fresh approach, breaking with the dogma of public=bad, private=good, and recognising the contribution elected local authorities can make, would inject a new optimism into demoralised inner city areas.

This would be a 'confident' answer to those who deliberately stigmatise council housing and tenants' aspirations, threaten means testing and short term tenancies to reduce tenants' security and are lobbying for the Cave Review to recommend deregulation, removing rent

controls, more public subsidies to private landlords and developers and replacing independent tenants organisation with customer panels.

The floated suggestion that new homes will be outside the HRA and the DCLG 'HRA opt out' pilot study is tacit acceptance that the HRA needs fundamental reform. If councils can borrow against rent to build and maintain new homes, why not for existing ones?

Councils have a proven track record and most of the problems with council housing arise from bad design and cheap building methods, not tenure. If councils need help improving their performance they could benefit from a new 'Continual Improvement Task Force'.

Gordon Brown's headlines on council housing are encouraging but we need to turn headlines and sound bites into real commitments. Tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs need to step up the pressure to win the 'Fourth Option' so council housing has a secure future for the millions who want it. United we are a force to be reckoned with, a force to win. Join us.



Defend Council Housing



Frank Dobson MP, member, House of Commons Council Housing group

● If you've got a ballot coming up, fight like hell to persuade people to vote NO – the more people who reject it the better chance we have of turning over this stupid policy...
What was left of my hair stood on end when I heard

these apparently New Left thinkers say that what is needed is insecurity of tenure. I bet they're not insecure in their tenure! And their idea of trying to avoid council estates becoming ghettos for the poor is to encourage people with a job and a bit of money to move out! Think about it..! There's one simple straightforward answer – we don't have enough houses in this country, so build the bloody things!



Lyn Ralph, chair, Doncaster Tenants Federation

● I believe Ministers wake in the wee small hours and think 'What can I throw at council tenants this week?'
Ms Kelly now wants to revert to the last century, means testing to force tenants to relinquish their hard fought for security of tenure, only gained in

1979... I am disgusted that yet again the tenants are being 'shafted'. Despite the obscene amount of money poured into Governments coffers from council rents, still they treat council tenants like something on the sole of their shoe!
We, Doncaster Federation of Tenants' & Residents' Associations fully support the aims of DCH to campaign against the abolition of secure tenancies.



Jack Dromey, Deputy General Secretary T&G

● Council tenants who do not want to transfer resent being told that it is the only way that they can get much needed improvements made.
Many tenants who have transferred rue the day because their rents are

soaring and their new landlords are not what they were cracked up to be...
Labour now needs to change course. Tenants should have real choice, including the right to stay with their council and to get much needed improvements made to their homes. And we need hundreds of thousands of new homes, including built by councils.

Council housing: A popular solution to housing need today

Politicians have deliberately tried to stigmatise council housing and hype up support for home ownership. But the picture they paint is false.
Shelter's research showed 72% put 'affordability' and a 'safe neighbourhood' above 'ownership' in their priorities and many Shared Ownership schemes are undersubscribed, despite the hefty public subsidies put in.
In several London boroughs

more than 1,000 applicants compete for a single council home. Nearly 500 went head to head in Leeds and Sheffield whilst 248 tenants put their names down for one Birmingham council tenancy.
"All over the country, ROOF found the most desirable homes are social and rented. And the people queuing up to be council tenants are not all poverty stricken and with multiple other problems. In Birmingham, 248

households bid for a two-bedroom house in Handsworth, 89 of whom had no priority. In Edinburgh, a single property attracted more than 800 bids... In Sheffield, 433 applicants were made for one house, with under half considered 'priority applicants'. In Leeds, 477 people applied for a three-bedroom home. Just under half actually qualified." (Shelter's *Roof* magazine May/June 2007)

Defend Council Housing
Hands off our homes
April/May 2006 No. 2
INSIDE: Ministers of the housing department...
STAND UP FOR COUNCIL HOUSING
Vote NO to privatisation • Demand investment in council housing • Defend secure lifelong tenancies

National twelve-page broadsheet
£18 per 100 / £100 per 1000
Case for Council Housing pamphlet £10 (or £2.50 for individual tenants / bulk orders)
Dear Gordon pamphlet £5 (or £1.50 individual tenants/bulk orders)

THE CASE FOR COUNCIL HOUSING IN 21ST CENTURY BRITAIN

DEAR GORDON
Invest in decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing

STAND UP FOR COUNCIL HOUSING

Ten Questions for candidates
Ask all politicians – including candidates for leadership of Labour Party – to respond to DCH's ten questions. Download from www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk and distribute at hustings meetings.
Organise a public meeting
DCH wants to organise a series of big public meetings across England, Scotland and Wales to 'Stand Up for Council Housing'. The meetings would rally support for a 'level playing field', direct investment to build new and im-

prove existing council housing, and organise opposition to any proposals to undermine our life-long secure tenancies, deregulate or take away rent controls.
Organise a meeting in your area. Make sure you build it big and broad. As well as tenants ask MPs and councillors from all parties (except the BNP and other Nazis) as well as leading trade unionists. Invite academics and local homeless organisations to speak too.
Contact the campaign for help, suggestions and model leaflets and posters.

Campaign against transfer, PFI or ALMOs

If a council near you is bullying and blackmailing tenants to accept stock transfer, PFI or Arms Length Management Organisations contact the campaign to help produce material to challenge their arguments. Make sure there's a fair and balanced debate and tenants hear both sides.

Lobby your MPs

Ask your MP to sign EDM 136 'Funding Decent Council Housing' tabled by Austin Mitchell MP and join the Commons Council Housing group to show their support.

Sign this on-line Downing Street petition

We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to provide the 'Fourth Option' of direct investment in council housing as an alternative to privatisation by stock transfer, PFI or ALMO, to enable local authorities to respect the choice of their tenants and bring all homes up to at least the government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010 and also build a new generation of decent, affordable and secure council homes for rent, accountable to an elected local authority landlord, and to give a clear commitment to defend the lifelong secure tenancy that council tenants enjoy and uphold the right of everyone who needs or wants to rent public housing to do so without time limit or means testing so that council housing can again become a tenure of choice and council estates can once again be a place that people are proud to live in.
● Go to the Prime Minister's website: <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/fourth-option>.

Defend Council Housing National Conference

STAND UP FOR COUNCIL HOUSING Thursday 12th July 2007 TUC, Congress House, Central London

Contributors to include:
● Professor **Peter Ambrose**, Brighton University ● **Weyman Bennett**, joint secretary, Unite Against Fascism ● **Gail Cartmail**, assistant general secretary Amicus ● **Lesley Carty**, Camden DCH ● **Frank Dobson MP** ● **Jack Dromey**, deputy general secretary T&G ● **John Grayson**, researcher and social historian, Sheffield Hallam University ● **Paul Holmes MP** ● **Jenni Marrow**, secretary, Scottish Tenants Organisation ● Cllr. **Abjol Miah**, Tower Hamlets Council ● **Austin Mitchell MP** ● **Paul O'Brien**, chief executive, Association for Public Service Excellence ● **Heather Wakefield**, national secretary UNISON ● **Lyn Ralph**, chair Doncaster Tenants Federation ● **Eileen Short**, Tower Hamlets Against Transfer ● Cllr. **Mike Tansey**, Sunderland City Council ● **Alan Walter**, chair Defend Council Housing ● **Dexter Whitfield**, European Services Strategy Unit ● Cllr. **Margaret Wilkinson**, executive member for Housing, Vale of Glamorgan Council

CONFERENCE TIMETABLE

09.30 – 10.30 Registration, films and transfer/PFI/ALMO advice session
10.45 – 11.00 Introduction
11.00 – 12.30 Plenary: Winning the 'Fourth Option'
12.30 – 01.15 Lunch
01.15 – 02.45 Workshop Session
02.45 – 03.00 Tea/Coffee break
03.00 – 04.30 Plenary: Building the campaign at national and local level

WORKSHOPS:

1. Funding the 'Fourth Option'
2. Debating Hills: The Role of Council Housing
3. The Cave Review: Deregulation, Profit and the Market
4. ALMOs: Revert back or two-stage privatisation
5. The Case Against Stock Transfer (inc post transfer experience)
6. Unite: Stop the Nazis exploiting housing
7. Independent tenants organisation or 'consumer panels'?
8. Organising Effective Local Campaigns

Please register me for the Defend Council Housing Conference on 12th July

Conference delegate fees:
 £20;
 £5 individual (unsponsored) tenants

Order campaign material
 Bulk order copies of twelve-page national broadsheet: £18 per 100 / £100 per 1000
 Annual subscription to DCH Mailings and Briefings £15
 'Case for Council Housing in 21st Century Britain' pamphlet £5 each (£2.50 bulk orders)
 'Dear Gordon' pamphlet £2.50 each (£1.50 bulk orders)

Name

Address.....

Organisation

Tel Email

Send to Defend Council Housing, PO Box 33519, London E2 9WW