

Defend Council Housing



Autumn 2005 25p

REASONS TO REJECT PRIVATISATION

- 1 Higher rents and service charges**
- 2 Tenants' security under threat**
- 3 No accountability**
- 4 Big profits and fat cat salaries**

Stock transfer, PFI and ALMOs threaten our security, push up rents and charges, and weaken our say over our accountable landlord.

- Stock transfer means your homes go to the private sector in one step. You lose your 'secure' tenancy, rents and charges rise and your home is run like a business, with banks and highly-paid executives in the driving seat (see centre pages).
- ALMOs were introduced in areas where tenants and councillors will not accept transfer. But don't be fooled - Arms Length Management Organisations are a two-stage strategy to privatise council housing (see page 6). If they have extra money for ALMOs why not for councils direct - unless privatisation is their real agenda?
- PFI means a multinational private consortium running your estate for 30 years! PFI in schools and hospitals has been a disaster. Profits come first, with massive delays, spiralling costs and standards of work and specifications cut. (see page 6)
- Organise a campaign against transfer, ALMO or PFI in your area. Demand a formal ballot and insist the council organise a fair and balanced debate so tenants hear both sides of the argument. (see page 3)

We're fighting for direct investment

COUNCIL TENANTS ARE ANGRY. The government talks about 'choice in public services' and then bullies and blackmails us to push privatisation of our homes.

Governments have been trying to privatise council housing since 1988 but resistance keeps mounting. Across the UK council tenants are saying No to the government's options of stock transfer, PFI and ALMOs. With the support of increasing numbers of trade unions, councillors and MPs we are demanding the 'fourth option' - direct investment.

The latest No Vote by Sedgefield tenants in Tony Blair's constituency shows we can stop them. Even when the council and predatory landlord spend a small fortune on glossy pamphlets, DVDs, teams out canvassing door to door, show flats re-carpeted and re-turfed lawns.

The tide is turning against them. The recent Council Housing group of MPs report spells out the arguments against privatisation, the lack of democracy and balanced debate and puts the case for the 'fourth option'.



Tenants challenging the council's arguments

Support for the 'fourth option' is growing across all parties. Last year's Labour Party conference voted 8:1 for a 'level playing field for council housing'. The Liberal Democrats say they support the 'fourth option' and a Tory housing spokesperson said he

supported it too.

The Audit Commission is adding to the pressure on Ministers. Their new report says existing policy is 'perverse' and recommends: "The government should review the council housing subsidy system"

And on the ground it's stalling. We know of more than 70 councils that have now formally decided, after consulting tenants, to keep their homes. Others are not confident they will get tenants to accept transfer, PFI or ALMOs. Ministers are increasingly isolated. Their policy is not sustainable.

Effective local campaigns can stop privatisation. And every No Vote adds to the pressure on government to concede direct investment.

The key to winning is to bring to-

“The 'market' has never provided decent housing for millions of working people and their families. Local authorities have a crucial contribution to make to solving the current housing crisis. Council housing is cheaper to build, manage and maintain than the alternatives so it makes economic sense. By investing in council housing we can achieve the goal of the decent homes standard, end the attrition against councillors and council tenants and contribute to addressing the housing crisis.”

Austin Mitchell MP, chair House of Commons Council Housing group

gether tenants, trade unionists and where possible councillors and MPs into a broad based local campaign. In every area where councils are promoting privatisation, a big No campaign is essential, with good material out on the estates as early as possible.

The TUC and all the major trade unions back the campaign. As well as protecting jobs and conditions they are speaking up for members who are council tenants and for the millions of working people who need decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing as an alternative to the private market.

Together we are a powerful force. We want the 'fourth option' - direct investment - not privatisation - and we're determined to win it!

Sedgefield tenants latest to Vote No

Tenants in Sedgefield voted nearly 60% against transfer - despite the usual glossy PR campaign involving endless brochures, DVDs and sustained door to door canvassing.

"They spent a small fortune trying to get tenants to transfer. Do some research - find out the information they don't want you to know and then make sure tenants hear both sides of the debate.

We got our arguments across by writing letters to the papers, leafleting door to door and going around with loudspeakers.

If we can stop them so can you."

Peter Dolan, tenant Newton Aycliffe, Sedgefield



Audit Commission backs call for 'review'

"The government should review the council housing subsidy system, considering the following matters:

- releasing from the system those authorities that can be self financing, linked with high performance;
- giving a specific focus on solutions for those authorities that currently rely heavily on the system"

(Financing Council Housing, June 05)

"The report's warning that as many as 58 councils may fail to meet the government's decent homes target is echoed by the ALG which has lobbied hard for more resources." (London Housing, Association of London Government, August 2005)

Bolsover Council calls conference

Bolsover council is taking the lead in bringing together authorities across the UK who want to keep their homes. 36 authorities have already expressed support. This conference will discuss a permanent organisation to lobby for a change in government policy and to look at joint procurement and extending best practice.

Encourage your council to send a delegation. Contact John Ford, Bolsover Council, Sherwood Lodge, Bolsover, Derbyshire S44 6NF John.Ford@bolsover.gov.uk



"An 8-1 vote at the Labour party conference to give people what's called the Fourth Option, to let council tenants remain council tenants if that's what they want – that's what we should stick to.

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" **Frank Dobson MP**

John Prescott: 'A promise is a promise'

Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott promised at last September's Labour conference: "Public financing of housing doesn't treat local authorities on a level playing field and I want to

see that changed and I promised to do that and look at an enquiry into it".

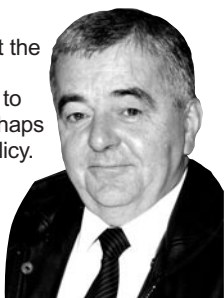
Join tenants, trade union and Labour Party members, officers and councillors calling on Prescott

to keep his promise (see back page).

Ask your Constituency Labour Party to submit a motion to the Labour Party conference this September.



“Elected local councillors are constantly subjected to a barrage of arguments, publications and seminars all aimed at getting us to accept the privatisation of our homes. This report is an invaluable resource for councillors around the country who need the evidence and arguments to put the case – often in the face of hostility from senior officers and perhaps colleagues over concerned at being ‘on message’ with government policy. This inquiry gave us the opportunity to feel part of a strong national movement to win the fourth option of direct investment. I hope that councillors in other authorities will help make sure this report is widely read.” **Councillor Brian Huddless, Cabinet member for Regeneration & Strategy, Bolsover District Council**



MPs debate ‘fourth option’

On June 29 so many MPs turned up for an adjournment debate on the ‘Fourth Option’ in Parliament they ran out of time. Here are some extracts from the debate.

“The mass of people who remained at home on 5 May came predominantly from our council estates. They were baffled and bemused as to why a Labour Government should be so unashamedly trying to undermine perhaps the greatest of our post-war achievements in the provision of public housing... They cannot understand why a Labour Government would be withdrawing support from councils and their tenants.” **Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East) (Lab/Co-op)** “I hope that the Government will heed the report of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Committee, the Public Accounts Committee, the Audit Commission and the Defend Council Housing group report, and rethink their policies.” **Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD)** “The Government say that the separation of strategic housing policy from the day-to-day maintenance and management of housing stock is an essential feature of Government policy. Why? Successive reports have shown that that is not necessary and does not result in greater satisfaction for the tenants of the transferred stock... We are getting whispers that the ALMOs may transfer completely out of council ownership... The tenants, certainly those in Bolton, have never voted even for the formation of an ALMO – they were merely consulted through tenants’ groups.” **Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East) (Lab)** “Carmarthenshire county council in Wales consulted its tenants.... The response was 90 per cent. in favour of keeping it in-house and keeping the county council as landlord... They know that privatisation could mean an absent landlord who absolutely does not care what happens to tenants.” **Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)** “When I stood for Parliament for the first time in 1987, I campaigned on my council estates on the basis that a vote for a Conservative Government would be a vote to privatise and sell the council houses.... Let us have no more of this nonsense, and let the tenants decide. They will put council housing where it belongs: in the hands of the locally elected council. The very least that they should expect is that the option should be theirs.” **Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East) (Lab)** “If a housing authority is good and the tenants do not wish to transfer or go for an arm’s length management organisation, I see no real reason why they should not remain and why there should not be a fourth option...”

I am concerned about... the accusations in respect of how some ballots are undertaken.” **Mr. Robert Syms (Poole) (Con Shadow Minister for Local Government)** “I assure hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber... that I acknowledge the strength of feeling demonstrated both in this morning’s contributions and in the number of Members present. In response to several requests, I will ensure that that feeling is communicated to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and to my colleagues at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.” **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Jim Fitzpatrick)**

MPs put the case for council housing

‘Fourth Option’ is affordable

The House of Commons Council Housing group launched a report “Support for the ‘Fourth Option’ for council housing”.

The report identifies the money government is siphoning out of council housing from tenants rents, ‘right to buy’ receipts; the extra cost of consultants and setup costs and higher housing benefit payments. The MPs call on government to ring fence all the money that broadly ‘belongs’ to council housing and use it to provide an ‘investment allowance’ to enable local authorities to borrow like other landlords, to provide the fourth option.

The report recommends: ‘To make choice a reality for tenants government has to provide a level playing field between the different options available and guarantee a ‘fair and balanced debate’ before tenants make a decision by a formal ballot’.

Prescott’s ‘basis of agreement’

At the Labour Party conference last September Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, said he was ‘near agreement’ on a formula after meeting senior trade union leaders, councillors and Labour Party regional representatives.

‘... we know that the basis of this “agreement” included acceptance that all councils who are good performers should have access to the extra money available to ALMOs – without the requirement that they set up a private company. This would go some way to squaring the circle... With our proposed ‘Continual Improvement Task Force’ and using best practice to raise standards we believe this is a formula which satisfies Treasury conditions for additional public investment tied to improvements in performance.’ (report Conclusion, page 36)

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

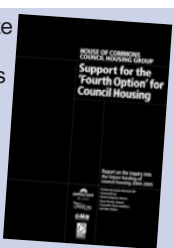


OUR INQUIRY HEARD from tenants, councillors, housing officers and trade unions from all over the country

We heard a catalogue of the pressures, abuses and propaganda used to bully councils and tenants. This report develops our case for the ‘fourth option’ of public investment in council housing. We need to give councils a level playing field to work on, the right to borrow prudentially and the right to keep all their own housing revenues by stopping government siphoning money out of Housing Revenue Accounts.

The ODPM’s ideological war against council housing and council ownership is a war against tenants. They mostly want to stay with the council. It costs millions to give away billions of pounds worth of public assets. It is purely ideological since councils have lower costs and can renovate and repair less expensively. It results in no real improvement in the lot of tenants but an increase in rents and charges. It distracts attention from the main housing problem: the need for far more public housing for those who can’t afford to get on a house price escalator accelerating beyond them. It’s time to change the policy. This document makes the very powerful case for that change.

Order and distribute this report to tenants, councillors and unions (£10 organisations - discounts for bulk purchase, free to individual tenants) from: Austin Mitchell MP, chair, House of Commons Council Housing group, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Phone 020 7219 4559. Email info@support4councilhousing.org.uk Download report and other information from www.support4councilhousing.org.uk Ask your MP to join the group and sign the Early Day Motion (below)



MONEY SIPHONED OUT OF COUNCIL HOUSING EACH YEAR

REVENUE	CAPITAL
Government take from HRA (Guideline Rent)	RTB Receipts = £2.0 billion
Management & Maintenance Allowance	Basic Credit Approvals = £0.75 billion
Major Repairs Allowance	Usable Receipts = £0.7 billion
Remainder taken out of council Housing Revenue Accounts	Government Profit = £0.55 billion

All figures England 2002/03. The picture is similar for Wales and Scotland.

Support our motion in Parliament

EDM 48 ‘Future of Council Housing’ has strong cross party support from Labour, Lib Dem, Conservative, SNP, Plaid Cymru, Unionist and Respect MPs – including many senior backbenchers and ex Ministers. **Get your MP to sign up too!**

“That this House supports the proposal from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee for an investment allowance to create a level playing field for council housing and enable local authorities to finance borrowing under the prudential framework to meet the Decent Homes Standard as an alternative to the Government’s three current options of stock transfer, private finance initiative

and arm’s length management organisations; shares the concerns expressed in the critical reports by the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office on the cost effectiveness of stock transfer; believes that a fourth option, allowing councils to improve their own stock, can be funded by re-investing all the income from tenants’ rents, capital receipts and savings on expensive set-up costs; notes the broad consensus of support from tenants, the Local Government Association and local authorities, the TUC and trade unions for the fourth option; welcomes the recognition by the Deputy Prime Minister on 26th September that ‘public financing of

housing doesn’t treat local authorities on a level playing field and I want to see that changed and I promised to do that and look at an inquiry into it’; and urges him to stand by this promise so that tenants can have a real choice, councils can compete on a level playing field and the public housing stock can be repaired, refurbished and expanded to make its contribution to the growing need for public rented housing, instead of wasting millions to give it away.” **Ask your MP to support this motion, join the House of Commons Council Housing group and support further adjournment debates in the House on the ‘fourth option’ for council housing.**

Union leaders back fight for council housing

“Against all the evidence that direct investment would be cheaper and deliver faster improvements, tenants, councils and housing workers are marched down the route of stock transfer, ALMOs or PFI against their wishes.



That so many councils have held out against transfer or privatisation is testament to the strength of feeling amongst tenants and councillors.

UNISON has campaigned hard for direct investment and will continue to support tenants and local authorities.” **Dave Prentis, general secretary UNISON**

“Ministers are facing growing opposition from council tenants, local authorities, councillors, trade unions and MPs. The Labour party conference voted overwhelmingly to oppose the privatisation of council housing. This sends a clear message that the government needs to rethink its position. Amicus will continue to campaign hard. We believe tenants deserve real choice – one that includes quality, affordable homes that are managed and owned by their locally accountable council.” **Derek Simpson, general secretary Amicus**



“Now that tenants in his own constituency of Sedgefield have joined the growing band of no-voters, perhaps the Prime Minister will finally listen. Especially as the turnout in the ballot topped voter turnout in Sedgefield in this year’s general election.



The case for the fourth option is unanswerable. We look forward to continuing to work with DCH nationally and locally to win this campaign once and for all.” **Paul Kenny, Acting General Secretary, GMB**

“We are determined to act as a champion of both Council tenants and our members... John [Prescott], I know you know the current policy is unfair. I know you want a review to put that wrong right. That review could then lead to a genuine level playing field, including councils being able to make greater use of prudential powers to borrow.” **Jack Dromey, Deputy General Secretary TGWU**



Tenants and councillors call government's bluff

MINISTERS ARE PLAYING a dangerous game of bluff. They hope to get more councils to transfer or ALMO, reducing the political pressure to concede the 'fourth option'. But they know that if tenants, councillors and trade unions refuse to be blackmailed, the government has no alternative.

Government gave councils a July 2005 deadline to come up with their 'stock option' for meeting the 2010 Decent Homes Target. The process was meant to bully and blackmail tenants and elected councillors into adopting one of their three options of transfer, PFI or ALMOs.

But at least 77 authorities have already decided on 'stock retention' and more are expected to join them.

Many of the authorities proposing stock transfer, PFI or ALMOs made their submission without full explanation and only consulted a minority of tenants. After recent big No votes in Ellesmere Port and Sedgefield – councils will realise they are likely to face strong opposition from tenants once they hear the arguments against.

Councils planning to set up an ALMO or PFI without a formal ballot fear they could be challenged in the court for not demonstrating genuine tenants' support.

The whole process is now in doubt. "Inside Housing understands that a number of councils are likely to be given small extensions to the long-standing deadline – and that others have been allowed to submit stock condition estimates rather than full surveys." *Inside Housing*, 29 July 2005.

Growing numbers of councils – including big authorities such as Birmingham, Camden and Southwark where tenants have voted No – are actively lobbying Ministers for direct investment.

What to do if your council is proposing transfer, PFI or ALMO

The 'stock options' proposal is just a proposal. Councils try and create the impression that the outcome is a 'done deal' but don't be intimidated.

Councils can and do change their mind – Harrow was due to set an ALMO and then decided it was cheaper to do the improvements itself!

Many councillors will have voted without fully understanding the issues or questioning the advice of senior council officers (who usually stand to gain from the proposal). Some will be open to persuasion.

Insist on a formal ballot

Some councils try and set up ALMOs or PFI schemes without holding a formal ballot of all tenants. The government requires them to 'demonstrate tenants support'. But if you don't challenge them they will try to submit lesser evidence of consulting tenants to avoid a proper vote.

Find out now and demand a full debate and a formal ballot of all tenants. Tenants in Camden, Lambeth, Nottingham, Sutton and elsewhere have all won this basic right. It's called democracy.

If your council tries to refuse:

- demand councillors – including those

'Thank you for sending me a copy regarding the Fourth Option. I dearly wish it was in my possession some months ago.'

North Somerset Councillor

Councils frequently mislead tenants by painting a very black and white picture: transfer, PFI or ALMO or 'you won't get any improvements'. Often they create a higher local 'Gold' standard – and then say the council can't afford it. Find out what improvements the council can do and whether the extra work is worth the

who support privatisation – defend tenants basic democratic rights (and remind them there are local elections next May!);

- organise a petition for tenants to say the existing consultation hasn't been sufficient and a ballot is required;
- threaten the council with legal action 'the matter is up to a vote of local tenants, and that is as it should be. Local tenants should have a vote. Local tenants should have a say in what they think should happen to their local social housing.' Under-Secretary of State Yvette Cooper, Hansard, 7 January 2004 – now Housing Minister.

"UCATT backed this campaign from the start. Now that the whole trade union movement is involved we need to push forward support for the 'Fourth Option' for council housing and expose the obscene waste of public money utilised in council propaganda. I urge Parliamentarians, Councillors, Tenants and Workers to come together and get the change in government policy that council tenants deserve".

Alan Ritchie, General Secretary UCATT



"I grew up in a council house. Many CWU postal and telecomms members are council tenants and have children who will need council housing when they grow up. The CWU is totally opposed to the privatisation of council housing and fully supports the campaign to win the 'fourth option'.

It's time the government saw sense and gave tenants the choice they want."

Billy Hayes, General Secretary CWU



risks involved.

Often the mandate from tenants claimed by the council only amounts to consulting a small minority of tenants.

With transfer they must ballot tenants. But if your council is proposing ALMO or PFI insist that they hold a formal ballot of all tenants (see below).

See page 7, contact DCH for help and order more copies of this newspaper and the MPs' report to send to every councillor, tenants reps, trade unions and local press.

Kate Hoey MP

“

If tenants vote NO then we need to go to the government and demand the Decent Homes Standard for everyone. It's unbelievable that the government could just say abandon residents. Well, I wouldn't let that happen. But we can only achieve it if we work together.

”

Harriet Harman MP

“

It is beyond belief that we are in this position – of so little being achieved after so long. I am bound by Tony Blair's promise to deliver for Aylesbury tenants. This has not been achieved... The ballot-vote must be respected with the whole estate staying with the Council – we must find the money for that.

”

We're getting organised

“Ellesmere Port & Neston tenants voted No. Our arguments about transfer were made through the letters page of the local free press. This was the cheapest way to talk to tenants.”

“Despite the transfer being supported by all the political parties on the Council, the so-called 'tenants association', and the local MP, our small campaign was able to secure a "No" vote. This was because the tenants were generally happy with the low rents and good service from the Council. They were instinctively suspicious of the transfer.”

Ray McHale, Ellesmere Port & Neston DCH

“Councillors voted 36 out of 47 for retention. We continue our campaign for the level playing field – the Fourth Option – direct investment and for councils to be treated in the same way housing associations are, so the council can build homes to meet the urgent demand and need.”

Chris Swinn, Northampton DCH

“We managed a couple of interviews on the local radio – people phoned in and said they had changed their mind and would go for 'stay with the council', we have had a couple of letters published, UNISON has sponsored us for three newspaper advertisements, and GMB for leaflets also. Our demonstration outside the civic offices went well. Hip hip hooray!, around 71% tenants overall voted to stay with the council”

Janette & Eamonn Bobey, Milton Keynes DCH

“Councillors in Lincoln have voted for the council to retain its housing stock despite being warned the move could trigger job cuts ... Officers have now estimated £15 million can be generated through 'prudent spending and redirected resources'”.

Inside Housing, 10 June 2005

“The council has announced its 'preferred option' to be stock transfer – the committee has twice recorded a negative vote against both stock transfer and ALMO.

“A sample petition carried out door to door in a couple of hours produced 270 signatures showing 99% of tenants in the council leader's own ward do not want privatisation. We're confident we can win a 'No' vote.”

Ruth Arundell, Brighton DCH

“Member of Defend Council Housing in the Braintree District, 68-year-old Malcolm Mead, said 'I'm very angry. The fight has just started' ...

“[Cllr] James Abbott said 'We are going down the wrong road, purely because we've been forced to do so by the government. We shouldn't be rolling over and letting them do whatever they want'....

“Defend Council Housing in the Braintree District has vowed to start a campaign against the proposals and will urge council tenants to vote 'no' to the move.”

Braintree and Witham Times, 23rd June 2005

“North Tyneside tenants voted 84% for stock retention after a long & protracted stock option appraisal, started in 2002. Attempts were made to bully the Steering Group by both the Council and the former head of the ODPM Task Force... North Tyneside had two ITAs, the first one attracted a vote of no confidence and a mass resignation of the Steering Group, the second was sacked by the Tenants Panel. The council has formally adopted stock retention, but now civil servants at

the Government Office of North East are refusing to accept this outcome. The real battle is about to begin. We're not going to give up! “

Terry Harding, North Tyneside tenant

“The result in Sedgefield proves that we do have a real say in the future of our homes and must not be fooled by the minority of tenants and paid advisors who pose as authentic interpreters of the wishes of all tenants. Tenants should take confidence from the MPs report and the growing support both locally and nationally and say no to stock transfer... what we want and need is direct investment in council housing not privatisation. There is still time for Prescott and the council to save face, stop blackmailing tenants and give us a real choice in the future of our homes”

Derrick Davey, North Lincolnshire Defend Council Housing

“The divisive deeply unpopular money-wasting Aylesbury SouthWest Corner scheme is in big trouble. Support for Tenants First Declaration is growing everyday, that's why politicians and tenants reps who want to truly represent tenants are speaking up and our estate has been hitting the national headlines.”

Piers Corbyn, Southwark DCH

Following the decision by Taunton Deane Borough Council to press ahead with a full consultation on the privatisation of our homes we tenants decided to form a campaign group to ensure that tenants have all the facts before a vote takes place. On one day we leafleted 800 homes, we all had tenants talking about it and not one was pro transfer in the slightest”

Pat Rowe, Taunton Deane Tenants Against Transfer

“We leafleted about 95% of the houses with a very small hardworking team and met some very nice people... We got a meeting off the ground today, and we had 80 people there. We asked for volunteers and we've got about 12 people that wanted to help, so what we're thinking of doing now is going out to the villages...”

George Watson, Defend Council Housing in Chester-le-Street

Crawley has the finance to meet Decent Homes. Nevertheless it too (like other areas) has produced a higher standard “DHS Plus” based on tenants “aspirations” – by strange coincidence only transfer can provide the necessary finance for this. The Tenants Panel – eight members – strongly supported the Housing Executive's recommendation for transfer. Meanwhile a local newspaper ran a survey and over 500 responded all in favour of stock retention.

Martin Ballard, Crawley Defend Council Housing

Why is there no alternative? Stock transfer will not solve the British Housing crisis – a more flexible, people-centred strategy is the only way forward. In Edinburgh the Council are spending millions of pounds on a “happy-clappy” campaign to spell out how wonderful life will be after stock transfer. That money could and should have been spent on improving tenants' homes, not on communications strategies, PR consultants, and glossy propaganda leaflets.”

Jenni Marrow, Edinburgh tenant.



Established stock transfer housing associations are attempting to scale back the number of councillors on their boards as they assert their independence from local authorities..."
Inside Housing
29 October 2004



I as a Ward Councillor have tremendous problems dealing with case problem issues with housing associations. They don't respond to councillors, they don't think you're important, so getting something done for a tenant on an RSL is very difficult. With my local authority it's not a problem."
Councillor Graham Harvey, Labour
Group Leader and Spokesman on Housing, Portsmouth City Council

Putting the arguments to Tony Blair

Academics, charities, trade unions and faith groups send the Prime Minister a memorandum

"Transfer also has an effect on the security of tenure and statutory rights of tenants since the tenancy becomes 'assured' rather than secure. According to Inside Housing (19 February 2003) evictions by RSLs have risen by 36% and figures from Communities Scotland show that the number of housing association evictions had risen by 64% in the two years 2000/1 to nearly double the rate for council evictions.

Pawson (2004) notes that there have been changes in the culture of housing management following transfer with '...more managerial and entrepreneurial tendencies.' This has occurred concomitantly with the shift towards housing groups that combine a number of pre-existing RSLs in a loose structure. Housing groups now own over 70% of the RSL stock....

The Audit Commission has criticised councils for 'mis-selling' the role of board members when promoting transfers. Resident representation does not necessarily empower tenants or leaseholders since the resident members are normally in a minority and may not be representative of local people as a whole. In any case all board members, whether residents or not, are legally obliged to give primacy to the company's interests and are not separately accountable to those they are appointed to represent. The report finds no clear evidence of benefits arising from resident board members.

There are no clear signs of management improvement gains from transfer. In fact it has been found (National Audit Office) that: '... nearly a fifth of English transfer Housing Associations have given rise to serious Housing Corporation concerns in relation to their financial viability and/or governance.'

Pawson (in Wilcox 2004) concludes that there is: '... remarkably little evidence available to inform any judgement as to whether transfer HAs actually manage housing more efficiently and effectively than local authorities'.

Zacchaeus 2000 Trust – Memorandum to the Prime Minister, page 43 May 2005 (www.z2k.org)

Rent restructuring

Government policy is to try and increase council rents to the much higher level of RSL rents, claiming that by 2012 tenants would pay the same rent whether their home is owned by a council or an RSL. The policy is unravelling, with a review postponed twice already.

The policy is under pressure from two sides. Supporters of council housing argue that if government is serious about keeping housing 'affordable' it would be better to reduce RSL rents down to council levels. Pushing rents up costs the Treasury more in Housing Benefit payments.

On the other hand RSLs are lobbying hard to be able to increase their rents by more than the policy currently allows. And this spells disaster for the promises made to tenants at transfer. (See Society Guardian, July 22 2005)

Higher rents and service charges

New research for the House of Commons Council Housing Group shows that despite promised rent guarantees for tenants after transfer, fifteen of the 20 fastest-increasing housing association rents between 1997 and 2004 were in housing transfer districts.

In Vale of the White Horse, which transferred in 1995, rents increased by 47% between 1997 and 2004. In the nine years since 3,000 homes in Wyre, Lancashire, were transferred and there has been an average rent rise of 56%. In Tunbridge Wells, Kent, where council housing was transferred in 1992, the increase was 43%. These are all way above the average Registered Social Landlord (RSL) rise in England of 24%. 'RSLs rent by district from 1997', ODPM

The National Audit Office found 17% of transfer associations had broken rent guarantees.

Supporters of transfer often claim that the government's 'rent convergence' policy will mean that there will be no difference between council and RSL rents. Well the fact is that RSL rents are now, on average, 20% higher than council rents (*Housing Corporation*) and they keep increasing. The government's 'rent convergence' policy is in trouble (see left) and it could unravel.

The new landlords can increase rents if they claim they have provided new facilities. On top of this many hit tenants hard by introducing new service charges.

"We were both elected as tenant representatives on to the board... after a couple of years they began to have financial problems, and so they decided to break promises that they had made. First of all they decided to increase rent by £10 a week for new tenants. They also took 47 homes that had been left empty and decided to turn them into a key-worker scheme that had rents £50 a week higher than the original rent. And these changes were made at secret meetings, and then the board was allowed to comment on them. We came out against those decisions and for our troubles were suspended from the board."

Nick Strauss, former tenant board member of Canalside Housing, Hackney

Loss of Security

Transfer forces tenants to exchange their 'secure' for an 'assured' tenancy. If ALMOs or PFI finances go pear-shaped their tenants will also be threatened with transfer, with the same final result.

RSLs have higher eviction rates. According to Communities Scotland housing association evictions had risen by 64% in 2000/1 to nearly double the rate for council evictions.

"Most tenants of local authorities enjoy security of tenure as secure tenants, protected by arguably the most generous charter of rights available in the residential sector. That security is lost on transfer." *Large Scale Voluntary Transfer: not all honey and roses*, Jan Luba QC, (2000) 4 L. & T. Rev. 6



Tower Hamlets Law Centre information sheet on stock transfer

There are differences in law between the two tenancies.

"If the council wants to evict you, they must prove both the ground for possession (e.g. rent arrears, anti-social behaviour) AND that it would be 'reasonable' to evict you.... A RSL can seek to evict you without the court having to consider 'reasonableness' in 8 out of 17 grounds for possession. For example if you are more than 8 weeks in arrears of rent on the day of the court hearing, the court will have to make a possession order even if the arrears are not your fault. (Ground 8)." *'Stock Transfer: Essential Reading Before You Choose'*, Tower Hamlets Law Centre

Councils claim that the new landlord will write additional rights into the new assured tenancy contract which will make it the equivalent of a secure tenancy. The Law Centre say:

"If an RSL wants to ignore the promises they have made in a tenancy agreement, and rely instead on the weaker rights set out in law, they may be able to do so. In a leading court case a judge found that a housing association were entitled to override the promise they had made to always give notice before issuing proceedings, because this was allowed by statute."

There is no guarantee that new tenants moving in after transfer will be given these extra contractual rights. "This may lead to two classes of tenants living side by side on the same estate."

Sunderland Housing Group, formed to take over Sunderland's housing in 2001, set up a profit-making subsidiary, which builds new homes for sale on the private market. The amount of affordable housing in Sunderland is being massively reduced, and widespread demolition in the name of 'regeneration' has devastated the city.

Sunderland's housing waiting list has shot up from 5,000 before transfer to more than 19,000. While homelessness grows, SHG has built itself new headquarters called Emperor House, and former housing director Peter Walls has seen his salary double to over £140,000 since he became chief executive.

The Housing Corporation was forced to act but they allowed SHG to organise the 'independent' inquiry into itself and won't publish the report!

REASONS TO REJECT PRIVATISATION

- 1 Higher rents and service charges**
- 2 Tenants' security under threat**
- 3 No accountability**
- 4 Big profits and fat cat salaries**



Public Housing Not Private Profit

RSLs borrow on the private market and behave like private companies. "Walker (2000) characterises housing associations as behaving increasingly like private sector organisations 'property-driven' and managing stock as an asset to maximise returns" *'Changing Boards, Emerging Tensions'*, Liz Cairncross, Oxford Brookes University, Spring 2004

Many transfer associations set up group structures so they can enter the world of private housing – market renting, new development and building luxury houses for sale. With many RSL board members now being paid, fat-cat salaries for senior executives, and banks and lenders in the driving seat, transfer is privatisation in law and in practice.

The 'Not for Profit' label RSLs use is meaningless. BUPA says it too is 'Not for Profit' but you wouldn't trust them running the NHS!

Unaccountable Boards

As tenants of a local council we get to elect our landlord. If we don't like the way they run our housing we can vote

"As you are aware I have declined to continue as one of the Council's nominated Board members after the changes in governance came into force, as I have no confidence in the Boards management of the Association... I see little evidence to suggest the Board is influencing the direction of the Association, merely responding to proposals from the Senior Management Team... I believe my own time will be better spent supporting them [tenants] to achieve a change in KHA's attitude, rather than in wasting any more time at Board level" **Councillor Ian Tilbury, letter of resignation from the board of Kingfisher HA, 4th June 2005**

them out every four years at the ballot box. This direct democratic relationship is lost after transfer, PFI or ALMO.

Few RSLs support genuinely independent tenants organisations. CHA recently disbanded its tenants forum because they were too critical.

Individual tenants on the board is a con. The role of tenant board members is "primarily symbolic, providing a fig

leaf to cover the unpalatable fact that the real power lies elsewhere." *Cairncross 2004*

Tenants on boards are bound by company law and, even if elected, will not be able to represent the tenants who elected them. 'At the time of transfer, tenants are often led to believe that they will have an explicit role in representing the interest of their fellow tenants on the board. This is not compatible with the accepted principle that dictates that as a board member they have to work for the interest of the organisation.' *Housing: Improving services through resident involvement, Audit Commission, June 2004*

Mergers & Takeovers

Tenants are often told they will be transferred to a locally-based organisation. But this doesn't last long.

"There is a merger mania just now that is being fuelled by the Housing Corporation saying future development cash will be concentrated on fewer and fewer associations." Derek Joseph, Managing Director, Tribal HCH consultancy *Society Guardian, 9 May 2005*

Anglia Group recently merged with Circle 33. Their Chief Executive told Inside Housing "that the creation of the new organisation would assist the M11 growth corridor's development". **Inside Housing, 30 Sep 2004**

Housing associations, like all private companies, are under pressure to grow. The last two years have seen 35 full scale mergers, with more becoming subsidiaries within a larger group. Many include transfer tenants.

Over 70% of RSL homes are now owned by group structures. Bigger RSLs pay more!

A significant number of associations get into financial trouble and many are then taken over.

Tenants do not get a vote on takeovers or mergers. And the take-over RSL is under no legal obligation to keep promises made at the time of transfer:

"The mortgage exclusion clause... means that if the RSL gets into financial difficulties and as a result the funded takes control and transfers to another RSL, the "new" RSL is not bound by any of the promises made to the tenants." *Housing Today, 21 January 2005*

Many of the commercial factors driving RSLs are likely to affect tenants in ALMOs and PFI schemes too.

ALMOs are talking about 'expansion' and 'diversification' and the proposals for ALMOs to borrow from private banks mean that if their business plans go pear-shaped councils will argue there is no alternative but to sell the homes (see next page).

PFI consortia are, by definition, massive businesses – usually operating on an international basis. For them one contract is just like another – a chance to make a profit.

"In 1993 East Cambridgeshire council tenants voted for what they were told would be a cosy little 'local housing company' called Hereward, just to run their 4,000 homes. Now, since April 1st this year, Hereward has joined the huge, 34,000-home Sanctuary Housing Association to become its east region subsidiary." **from a letter in the 'Cambridgeshire Times' 20 May 2005**

"Amicus and Horizon housing groups have revealed merger talks are underway in a move that would create one of the largest landlords in the country." **Inside Housing, 14 April 2005**

Liverpool-based Riverside Group and London-based English Churches HA plan to create England's joint largest association with 52,000 properties, operating in 200 council areas.

Poor performance

One in five transfer associations has been placed under supervision by the Housing Corporation. "Such action, which involves the appointment of external experts to the board of the association, is only triggered by poor performance or serious management irregularities," *Guardian 25 May 2005*

Despite millions of pounds spent on housing after transfer, the Public Accounts Committee found only a 3% increase in tenants satisfied with the condition of their home (81% from 78% before transfer). Only 85% of tenants considered that housing services were at least as good as before transfer, while satisfaction with the quality of repairs went down (63% against 68%). *Improving Social Housing Through Transfer, Public Accounts Committee report, March 2003*

If promises are broken, there is little tenants can do, because offer document promises are a contract between the RSL and the council, not with the individual tenant.

"the question that tenants need to be asking is whether these promises are legally enforceable.... the RSL, backed by the funder, will try to limit the RSL's obligations to "reasonable efforts" to keep the promises. And what reasonable efforts are, particularly for a charitable RSL, depends on the context at the time delivery is required." *Housing Today 21 January 2005.*

Separation creates problems

The government claims that forcing councils to separate housing strategy from management, with separate companies (whether an RSL, ALMO or PFI consortium) taking on day to day management and maintenance, leads to better services. But they have never shown any evidence to support this.

Heriot-Watt University researched the effects of separation after transfer.

Alistair McIntosh, from the Housing Quality Network which commissioned the report, said "There doesn't appear to be a lot of empirical evidence suggesting that the only correct route is to make a split between the strategic enabling function and the landlord function. It's been carried on without any research or rationality underpinning it." *Inside Housing 11 January 2002.*

The House of Commons select committee scrutinising the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister reports:

"there is no clear positive correlation between a separation of the two tasks and excellence in either strategic management or stock management... The Audit Commission indicated that the issue is not as straightforward as the Government would have us believe... The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) came to much the same conclusion arguing that there is no theoretical or practical reason why Local Authorities cannot handle both the strategic management of housing policy as well as managing a portfolio of social housing at ground level... The Committee is not convinced that ALMOs and stock transfer RSLs necessarily lead to better tenant participation and satisfaction. There is no reason to suggest that the same results and management innovations could not be achieved under Council management, given equal resources." *ODPM Select Committee Report on Decent Homes 7th May 2004*

"We were promised a community centre... and refurbishment of the children's play areas (the money for it was ring-fenced) five years ago when we transferred... [they] want to build a new area office... plus flats for shared ownership which we don't want built... they are already doing away with one children's playground and garages and replacing them with another 16 new properties." **Fred Hunt, Secretary, Minerva Estate TRA, Tower Hamlets**

Community Gateway/ Community Mutual: stock transfer with a new cover

The 'Community Gateway Model' in England and 'Community Mutual' in Wales is no more than a re-branding exercise. Trying to wrap privatisation in 'co-operative' language doesn't change the facts.

Despite the fancy names these are still stock transfer organisations, removing our homes from public ownership and democratic control. They are still private companies which borrow on the private market. They are subject to just the same risks and pressures as other transfer organisations.

It is not true that it gives tenants any more power than ordinary stock transfer. The crucial point is that tenants on the board of directors have a legal obligation to the company – not to other tenants. Having more or less directors doesn't change this fundamental relationship.

Government claims that there will be a majority of tenants on the board is false. In Preston, the authority which is 'piloting' the first community gateway, there are seven tenants out of fifteen: so tenants are still in a minority. The tenants in Preston, believing they were empowered, tried to change the standard model for the legal set-up of the new company. They wanted to add 'community empowerment' as one of the companies legal objects, but the Housing Corporation wouldn't let them do it:

"The [Housing] corporation said the inclusion of 'community empowerment' as an objective in the gateway's rules would contravene the 1996 Housing Act. ... Tenants are, however, unlikely to be able to directly influence decisions taken by the board, according to the report. 'At this stage the tenant steering group cannot be said to be a tenant democracy.'" *Inside Housing, 14 July 2004.*

In a 'Community Mutual' association each tenant has a share in the company. But the shareholders are not allowed to elect the board of directors! It's a complete mockery, where tenants won't even have the rights shareholders have in an ordinary commercial company.

They will only be able to elect the tenant representatives, one-third of the board. And these 'representatives' will have no more power than tenants on the board of any other RSL.

Tenants receiving Housing Benefit threatened too

Some tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit may think they won't be affected by big rent increases. But government has a "controversial plan to replace housing benefit with a new flat-rate allowance aimed at encouraging tenants to shop around for cheaper housing... legislation is also expected to allow the new flat-rate allowance to be introduced for council and housing association tenants." *The Guardian, May 17 2005*

Tenants who now get all their rent paid by Housing Benefit could find higher rents after transfer are beyond their reach.



“ If too many tenants... opt for an ALMO as second best – then at some stage we're going to find out that those tenants really haven't got the right to have an Almo either, because there isn't sufficient resources under the government borrowing rules, and they're all going to be forced into a stock transfer whether they like it or not... The Fourth Option must be put back on the table – we've got to get the government to accept it.'
Clive Betts MP vice-chair ODPM select committee

ALMOs: first step to privatisation

ALMOs (Arms Length Management Organisations) were thought up to try and get around opposition from tenants to stock transfer. Setting up a new private company, re-branding council housing and putting as much distance as possible between the new company and the council, make it much easier to get privatisation through in the end. That's why we call ALMOs 'two-stage' privatisation.

The big bribe is extra government money. But the obvious question is if the government has extra money to improve our homes why not give it to local authorities direct – what tenants want – unless, of course, the real agenda is privatisation?

If you don't want privatisation – don't take the first step!



Tenants petitioning for direct investment after No vote in Camden

COUNCILS WHO PROMOTED ALMOs promised tenants they were being set up just to carry out a programme of improvements and guaranteed there would be no move towards privatisation. Many promised to take the homes back immediately if there were any problems and to wind up the ALMO once the 5-year contract expired and the promised improvements had been completed.

But back in June 2003 Wendy Jarvis, the head of local authority housing finance at the ODPM, explained: "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.

Gordon Perry, former chair of the

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

In April 2005 the National Federation of ALMOs and the Chartered Institute of Housing produced proposals to put ALMO companies in the private sector (*ALMOs: A New Future for Council Housing*, Housemark/ NFA/ CIH, April 2005).

This would mean:

- A long-term contract of 35 years;

- ALMOs borrowing on the private market like RSLs;

- ALMOs taking over control of the Housing Revenue Account (the money the council spends on its homes);

- the banks (not the council) having the right to step in if problems arise.

The link between the council and the ALMO will be so tenuous as to become meaningless. And there's a very real risk – as we predicted from the start, that an ALMO will lead to privatisation in a second stage.

The report points out the fact that

No 'tenants power' in ALMOs

Tenants will have no more say in ALMOs than they do in housing associations – all the same problems apply (see centre pages).

They want tame, unaccountable tenants on the board.

"Islington have banned officers of tenants and residents associations from being board members. Councillor, Euan Cameron, explained "We want to open these panels out to the community, not have the same old faces."

Islington Tribune, 22 July 2005.

"Sutton Council are refusing to let members who hold a position in the Federation or residents association sit on an ALMO's board. Sutton Federation have opposed this and have refused to be part of the ALMO process." **Jo Gibson, Sutton tenant**

“ ALMO – it's a 'job and finish'. They were set up to achieve the Decent Homes target. Once they have done their job they are finished.

Reverting back to direct council management shuts the door firmly against two-stage privatisation. Obviously any improved procedures and better tenant involvement under the ALMO can be adopted by the local authority."

Councillor Chris Weldon, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Regeneration, Sheffield Council

the new borrowing would be more expensive than public sector borrowing. It could mean cuts to services – what they like to call 'efficiencies'.

"If the ALMO were to get into financial difficulties or fail under the contract, lenders would take responsibility for sorting things out... The council would have no controlling say in sorting out the financial affairs of the ALMO."

"After partial or full Treasury write-offs of council housing debt, private ALMOs will raise quasi-PFI loan finance on the back of long-term contracts with local authorities, possibly stretching out to 35 years." *Social Housing*, Feb 2005.

The risks involved are high. The Treasury is concerned that "councils would remain liable if their ALMOs' business plan failed" which could be a large liability for local authorities and the public sector generally, so it wants a bigger legal and financial distance between the council and the ALMO. *Inside Housing*, 17 June 2005.

An *Inside Housing* editorial commented: "Opponents of ALMOs have said all along that they were a stepping stone to 'privatisation'. There was little difficulty in rebuffing them in the past but now they'll have more ammunition."

The Centre for Public Services comments: "In reality, if these proposals are adopted, the banks/lenders will exercise control over the policy and financial decisions of the ALMO board. And whilst the council still formally retains ownership of the stock at this time the question has to be for how long? ... If, for instance, the ALMO had either spent anticipated HRA income for future years or borrowed against that income then the authority would find itself unable to take management of the homes back in house. In this situation it is not hard

to envisage that the authority would be telling its tenants that there was no alternative but stock transfer." *The Future of ALMOs Briefing*, June 2005

"When tenants vote on a proposal which is supported by Government they have an expectation and right to believe that Government will not seek to change the ground rules on which such a fundamental decision about the future of their homes is based." Clive Betts MP.

The government review – postponed from last year – has been delayed again. They want to get as many ALMOs set up as possible before announcing the next step.

Invite speakers from Camden to explain to tenants and council workers in your area why Camden tenants voted 77% No to ALMO. Make sure you hear both sides of the argument.

“ What I encountered was perplexity, unease, suspicion about why this

[ALMO] was necessary... the vote was a thumping, unambiguous, clear no...if choice is the fourth principle of public service reform how can you possibly ignore the choice that tenants have made?

There is no clear

evidence that separating the strategic from management, that ALMO, that RSLs lead to improved performance".

Jane Roberts, Leader Camden Council



Massive risk with PFI

PFI'S RECORD IS APPALLING. It is expensive, takes years to setup and unreliable, prone to delays and unaccountable. The idea that these private companies will still be running our estates in thirty years time when we might be gone and our children are the tenants is truly frightening.

Maiden Lane tenants in Camden voted by over 80% 'NO to PFI'. Only three schemes have actually begun, and one of those, in Islington, has been a disaster.

Two more have been abandoned altogether, and another is still in negotiation after being rejected by the Treasury as too expensive...even the government now admits that PFI to improve housing is not a good solution.

The extra costs involved, the contracts negotiated behind closed doors, and the real danger that schemes can and do go pear shaped at our expense, mean council tenants will lose out if PFI comes in.

Refurbishment PFI "must stop"

"The private finance initiative should be abandoned for social housing refurbishment schemes, a PFI expert has warned. Jeff Zitron, a director of Tribal HCH, said the government should stop funding PFI schemes to refurbish social housing because the risks attached were too costly" *Inside Housing*, 20 June 2005

Government admits problems with PFI

"Neil McDonald, the director of housing at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, conceded that a pilot project to test the PFI on council housing had highlighted difficulties with the process." *Society Guardian*, 22 June 2005

Disaster strikes Islington PFI

The first housing PFI schemes have only recently been set up, but already evidence is emerging of disastrous experiences, as the PFI consortia try and cut corners.

The *Islington Tribune* reported in March 2005 on problems which included "sub-standard workmanship, bullying site managers, a lack of care for residents and their homes...and builders who left work incomplete, unsafe or unsatisfactory".

Consul, who carried out a survey of residents, concluded "All stated to us that if they had realised what they would have to go through during the course of work inside their homes, they would never have allowed the contractor to commence work", *Islington Tribune*, 25 March 2005.

Following these problems Isling-

ton council put on hold its plans for a second PFI scheme (*Islington Tribune*, 13 May 2005) and Ashford Council dropped United House as its preferred bidder.

"A consortium behind several high-profile housing PFI deals has been dropped as the preferred partner for a £200 million project after the council lost confidence in its members' ability to work together... amid

"Partners [Islington PFI] is demanding a 56 per cent management charge for work carried out. So, for every £100 spent, just £44 will go into the actual labour and materials." **Michael Read, member of Islington Leaseholders Forum, Islington Tribune**, 15 April 2005

concerns over the consortium's performance" (*Inside Housing* 09 June 2005).

This is what happens when a large private company gets its hands on a 30 year project. These consortia have the legal expertise and resources to run rings around the civil servants and council officers who are expected to police the contracts. That's why some contract negotiations fail – the contractor wants higher payments and lower specifications to maximise profits.

The crisis at Whittington Hospital in north London where work stopped for months because Jarvis couldn't pay its sub contractors is just one example. Imagine what that would be like if it happened part way through a PFI scheme on your estate!

“South Cambs District Council voted by 26 votes to 22 with 2 abstentions not to pursue stock transfer following a "test of opinion" in which 82% opposed transfer. This was in spite of months of one-sided propaganda promoting transfer. Thank you for all the help and information. The DCH website is packed with material - I recommend it to all those faced with transfer, PFI or ALMO.”
Councillor Neil Scarr, South Cambridgeshire Council



Brighton councillor addresses lobby at the Town Hall

Organising an effective local campaign

ORGANISING AN EFFECTIVE local campaign isn't rocket science but it does need careful planning. The sooner you start the better. It's amazing how time flies.

Tenants should be central but the trade unions, councillors and MPs and local activists can contribute experience, knowledge of housing finance, organisational support and funding.

Don't be bamboozled! There is a vast amount of support and experience available.

Make sure the campaign is as broad-based as possible involving all those opposed to privatisation who want to fight for direct investment.

Councils often try to bully and blackmail housing workers as well as tenants. Tenants are told we won't get

improvements and workers are warned about jobs and career prospects.

We have a common interest in defending decent public services. All the unions nationally oppose housing privatisation so talk to local union reps and housing workers and urge them to organise union meetings to counter management's propaganda. And remind them that the senior managers pushing privatisation are often motivated by big pay rises for themselves rather than the interests of tenants and workers.

Existing tenants organisation can provide a core to the campaign. But in many areas the council has deliberately cultivated tame tenants groups with often hand picked, unelected and unac-

Formally ask your council to sign up to the House of Commons Council Housing group's 'Code of Practice' guaranteeing a democratic debate and formal ballot.

countable individuals who are flattered - and intimidated - into compliance.

Ask to speak at all tenants meetings and steering groups but don't be put off if key figures give you the cold shoulder. A direct appeal to tenants on the estates is the key.

Councils say tenants should have all the available information to make their decision but they usually conduct a one-sided debate. Demand the council agree a 'code of conduct' to guarantee a fair and balanced debate (use the recommendations from the MPs

report – see below).

Ask the council to organise a series of big public meetings with speakers to put both sides of the argument. If they refuse organise your own debates and publicly challenge the council to attend.

A high profile is important. Leaflets on their own are not enough. A poster campaign on estates, public meetings with national speakers, letters to the press, radio interviews, loudspeaker cars, stalls in shopping areas, leafleting parents outside primary schools as well as churches, mosques, social clubs and other meeting places all help show we're serious.

But there's no substitute for getting out on the estates and going door to

door. This is the best way to get the argument across, answer questions and you will find new people to help campaign. Where possible get tenants' associations to do their own estates and involve community centres, clubs and other local organisations too.

Approach it like an election - get named individuals to take responsibility and organise distribution teams for their patch.

Producing clear and informative campaign material is essential. Give tenants the main arguments why they should Vote No, unpick the council's propaganda and let everyone know there is a national campaign fighting for an alternative. DCH can help you produce local leaflets, newspapers like this one, posters and stickers.

Campaign checklist

- Find out what the council is proposing - read the council's 'options appraisal' report, 'business plan' and minutes of meetings.
- Identify what repairs/improvements the council is proposing, the cost and the funding gap the council claims exists. Make up your own mind whether this is an accurate picture.
- Organise a local DCH meeting to plan the campaign. Involve tenants, trade unionists and, where possible councillors and MPs too.
- Produce a good local leaflet and newspapers to distribute to every home.
- Leaflet every home but also have stalls at markets and high streets and give out material at churches, mosques and to parents outside primary schools

- High visibility is important: get posters up on every estate and street, and borrow a car loudspeaker to tour estates
- Send letters to the local press, organise lobbies or stunts to get publicity and ask trade unions to sponsor adverts in the press to put the arguments across
- Approach local unions for financial support. Many unions have special regional and national funds that local branches can apply to.
- The earlier you start campaigning the better. And don't trust any ballot start date the council may publicise - they regularly start ballots early to out-manoeuvre opponents.
- Contact DCH to get more copies of this newspaper to get the arguments across to tenants. We can also help with writing leaflets and speakers. There are plenty of examples on the campaign website.

What you can do

- Order copies of this newspaper to distribute to tenants, trade unionists and councillors in your area
- Hold a local public meeting
- Get your MP to sign the motion in Parliament EDM 48
- Affiliate to DCH

Affiliate: tenants/community organisations local £10; regional £25; national £50; trade unions local £40; regional £100; national £250
Order material: Campaign briefings: £15 per annum; copies of this broadsheet: £18 per 100; £100 per 1000; A3 Posters £15 per 100 and "Support for the 'Fourth Option' for council housing" report £10 with reductions on bulk orders - free to individual tenants.



www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk a campaign resource

You can read and download all the information you need to organise an effective campaign, including many of the reports and press articles referred to in this broadsheet. Check the text links at top of website for:
| National Material | Local Material | Statements/Broadcasts
| Stock Transfer | ALMO | PFI | Stock Options | Real Choice
| Reports & Submissions | Press Archive |

Defend Council Housing

Hands off our homes

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Latest News...

Sedgefield tenants vote 58% NO! Tenants in Sedgefield voted 58.1% NO on a 73% turnout against transfer to Sunderland Housing Group (July 19). Tenants were subjected to the usual glossy PR campaign involving endless brochures, DVDs and sustained door to door canvassing. The show home to tempt tenants to give up their secure tenancies and lower rents was recaptured throughout and even had the lawn returned!

Audit Commission: 'Financing council housing' report

Privatisation hits the buffers

Tenants in a growing list of authorities are deciding to remain with the council, get most improvements done now using existing resources whilst joining the campaign to win more investment.

77 councils have already decided to keep their homes. Others are delaying a decision. Many proposing transfer or ALMO expect strong resistance as new local campaigns spring up, bringing together tenants, unions and often councillors, to take the arguments onto the estates. See DCH press statement (2 August) and returns to our enquiries on local authority stock options decisions.

DEFEND COUNCIL HOUSING

VOTE NO TO PRIVATISATION

Don't let these vultures get their hands on our estates

City banks - the real power behind Harca, Toynbee, East End Homes, THCH, Guinness and the rest - want to make profits out of building private homes for sale on our estates

WE WANT IMPROVEMENTS BUT WE DON'T WANT A PRIVATE COMPANY - WE DEMAND DIRECT INVESTMENT IN COUNCIL HOUSING

VOTE NO DON'T LET THEM PRIVATISE OUR HOMES

DEFEND COUNCIL HOUSING



Tell Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott

A PROMISE IS A PROMISE

“By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities.” Labour Party Manifesto 2005

SIGN THE OPEN LETTER

At the Labour Party annual conference last year, the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, said:

“Public financing of housing doesn’t treat local authorities on a level playing field and I want to see that changed and I promised to do that and look at an enquiry into it.”

Prescott has since tried to get out of his commitment but now the Audit Commission is calling for a ‘review’.

■ **Get tenants, trade unionists, councillors and MPs to sign this open letter and tell Prescott ‘A promise is a promise’.**
Cut or copy the letter from this page or download from DCH website.

■ **Ask your MPs to support the motion in parliament: EDM 48 ‘Future for Council Housing’.**

Get tenants reps, councillors, unions and MPs to sign the Open Letter to John Prescott

“A PROMISE IS A PROMISE”

OPEN LETTER TO THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, 1 November 2004

Dear John Prescott,

At the Labour Party Conference on September 26th you said: “Public financing of housing doesn’t treat local authorities on a level playing field and I want to see that changed and I promised to do that and look at an enquiry into it”. You told delegates you were “near agreement”. Your housing minister said after the vote: “We recognise yesterday’s vote and we will engage as a result of that... We are continuing the review as we promised to do... We are continuing a negotiation, a discussion, with the various interested parties.”

This public commitment to a level playing field for council housing by the Deputy Prime Minister, accompanied by a promise of an inquiry, is a promise council tenants around the country expect to be honoured.

However in your letter to Austin Mitchell MP, delivered in time for the DCH national conference on October 29, attended by more than 350 council tenants, local councillors, trade unionists and MPs from 86 areas, you say “The review mentioned in your letter was explicitly conditional on the mover of the alternative wording... agreeing to withdraw”.

In discussions leading up to the conference we understand significant progress was made on the issue of allowing ‘good’ performing authorities to access the additional investment currently conditional on ALMOs - without the need for councils to set up a private company. We also understand that the Treasury broadly accepted the clear financial evidence we have presented demonstrating that the ‘fourth option’ is financially viable.

This offers a clear way forward. If your department also agrees to provide commitment and resources for a ‘Continuous Improvement Task Force’ - to bring together best practice on issues such as voids, repairs and housing strategy - it would help all authorities improve their performance and access these funds.

The current government position is inconsistent and flies in the face of evidence from the National Audit Office, the Commons Public Accounts and ODPM Select Committees, the Local Government Association, House of Commons Council Housing group of MPs, trade unions and others. Privatisation of council housing is deeply unpopular and there is no evidence to support the dogmatic insistence on separating housing management from strategy.

Government Ministers have put considerable emphasis on ‘choice in public services’. Denying council tenants the right to choose to remain as council tenants and get improvements to their homes clearly fails this test.

We urge you to stand by the commitment you made - this is not a procedural game. A promise is a promise.

Yours sincerely,

Name	Position	Organisation	Signature	Email/Tel No

INVEST IN COUNCIL HOUSING

**Defend Council Housing write PO Box 33519, London E2 9WW
phone 020 7987 9989 email info@defendcouncilhousing.org.uk
website www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk**

Display this poster on your estate and at work – do not flypost