

# Defend Council Housing



## COME TO PARLIAMENT JANUARY 22

Lobby MPs to secure changes to the Housing & Regeneration Bill. 200 authorities need to win the 'Fourth Option' to secure a long-term future for existing council housing. Building a new generation of first class council housing with lower rents, secure tenancies and a landlord tenants can hold to account is the most effective way to tackle housing need today. For more info please go to [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk)

### '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;
4. Detailed proposals and a clearly defined timetable for implementation;
5. An immediate moratorium on any further transfers, PFI or ALMOs, demolition schemes or sale of council land and properties, until the new options have been formulated, to give tenants real choice.



COMMUNICATION WORKERS UNION



UNISON the public service union



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# STAND UP FOR COUNCIL HOUSING

**GOVERNMENT HAS INTRODUCED A new Housing and Re-generation Bill. This provides an opportunity to secure changes so councils can improve existing, build new and maintain all council housing as first class housing for years to come.**

Our opponents seek to means test 'low cost rented housing', give predatory landlords opportunities to buy council estates, transfer key decisions from Ministers to new quangos and break up the national Housing Revenue Account – without putting in place guarantees for all councils.

Tenants, trade unionists and councillors need to organise now to make sure we get the right result!

The Bill, as it stands, continues the discrimination against council housing. Profit making landlords can apply for Social Housing Grant. But councils cannot unless they set up arms length companies. Why?

Councils are being cajoled and bribed to put public land into public/private partnerships (Local Housing Companies) that will build private – not council – housing.

The official 'Impact Assessment' also admits the present housing finance (HRA) regime is unsustainable.

This all falls a long way short of the 'warm words' for council housing we heard over the summer from Ministers, would-be Deputy Leaders of the Labour Party and the Prime Minister himself.

We desperately need more homes – it is shocking that so many people are living in appalling housing need. The private sector can't deliver. They never have before – why should they now? So government must invest in first class council housing to provide quality housing – not rabbit hutches; secure homes protected against eviction; and actually affordable (not just labelled as such).

The obsession with home ownership is not the solution. Only 15% of those accessing public subsidies were from the priority groups of council or housing association tenants. Government must direct public subsidies to invest in a strong public (council) housing sector for those who don't want or can't afford to buy, to provide a real alternative for those in temporary accommodation, facing chronic over-



**by Austin Mitchell  
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crowding and for young adults trying to move out from under their parents' feet.

Three Labour conferences have backed the demand for the 'Fourth Option' and Ministers only avoided a fourth consecutive defeat in September by scrapping votes at the conference!

Against us are those who clearly want to get rid of council housing, proposing means testing and time-limited tenancies in their war on 'dependency'. This is nonsense.

In 1979 '20% of the richest tenth lived in social housing' (Prof. John Hills, Ends and Means, Feb 2007). Today 'people queuing up to be council tenants are not all poverty stricken and with multiple other problems' (Roof magazine, Shelter, May/June 2007). The 1.6 million households on council housing waiting lists include butchers, bakers, teachers and nurses who want a first class secure council home with lower rents and an accountable landlord. Investment in council housing can satisfy their need and, in the process, make estates the 'mixed communities' they used to be.

There is nothing in the bill to stop government siphoning money from tenants' rents and capital receipts. There should be. This would enable councils to fund much-needed repairs, respect the choice of their tenants, and provide new homes for those who need them.

Without these changes over 200 authorities face the continuing threat of privatisation: those who have decided to retain their stock, those with ALMOs and those yet to decide. That's not on.

Tenants, the trade union movement, councillors and MPs across all parties as well as increasing number of housing professionals and academics support the call for the 'Fourth Option'. This Bill is an opportunity for government to meet their expectations. Help make sure they take it.

The Commons Council Housing group is organising an inquiry to support amendments to the Bill. Submit written evidence, organise a delegation to Parliament on January 22 and contact your MPs now and ask them to sign our Early Day Motion (EDM 368) and meet you when you come down.. ■

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Get local organisations to produce written evidence to the MP's enquiry. Encourage your council to respond officially and use its expertise to provide financial information to support the case for the 'Fourth Option'.
- Organise a delegation on January 22 of tenants, trade unions, councillors and officers to come to Parliament and take part in the

- inquiry and meet your local MP. Propose the council fund the delegation to empower tenants.
- Invite your MP(s) to attend the session on January 22 and meet your delegation. If this is not possible meet him/her locally to discuss amendments to the Bill (see DCH website) and send in a report.
- Ask your MP to sign EDM 368 Investment in Council Housing and to

- join the Council Housing group at Parliament.
- The Report Stage and Third Reading of the Bill is expected late January so please send evidence, as soon as possible, to Austin Mitchell MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Email [info@support4councilhousing.org.uk](mailto:info@support4councilhousing.org.uk) or phone 020 7219 4559 for further details and to request a timeslot on January 22.