

‘FOURTH OPTION’: INVEST IN COUNCIL HOUSING

Dear Tony Blair,

TENANTS, TRADE UNIONISTS, COUNCILLORS and MPs across the UK call on government to introduce the ‘Fourth Option’ for council housing – direct investment to improve council homes and estates – as a matter of urgency.

The blackmailing and bullying of council tenants to accept the government’s privatisation options of transfer, PFI or ALMOs is provoking widespread opposition and causing deep resentment. It makes a mockery of your rhetoric of ‘Choice’ in public services.

Tenants are increasingly voting NO – including in your own constituency – despite the lack of a fair and balanced debate and the millions of pounds spent promoting privatisation.

The Labour Party 2005 manifesto promised “By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities.” The government’s existing policy is failing to meet this commitment.

Your own party conference has twice voted overwhelmingly in support of investing in council housing with an almost unanimous vote last year calling on government to “provide the ‘fourth option’ of direct investment to council housing as a matter of urgency.”

Decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing provides a crucial alternative to the private market. The 1.5 million households on council housing waiting lists are testimony to the scale of the current housing crisis and the popularity of council housing.

The government’s policy is untenable. It flies in the face of a wide range of evidence including: the ODPM Select Committee’s report on ‘Decent Homes’ that backed the call for an ‘investment allowance’; the Public Accounts Committee who said stock transfer was more expensive; the House of Commons Council Housing group which set out the case for the ‘Fourth Option’; and the Audit Commission who called for a ‘review’ of housing finance.

The financial case for the ‘Fourth Option’ is overwhelming: if all the money generated from tenants’ rents and capital receipts; gap funding; waste on expensive consultants and setup costs is ring-fenced there is more than enough to fund direct investment in council housing so all local authorities can meet the Decent Homes standard.

Direct investment to improve existing and build new council homes offers the cheapest, quickest and most popular solution to provide first class, secure and accountable housing that is genuinely affordable for all who need it in 21st Century Britain.

It’s time the government listened! Three million council tenants, trade unions and many councillors and MPs demand improvements to council homes and estates and the guarantee of a secure future for council housing.

Yours.....

