

DCH Conference Statement, 22 May 2006

The alliance of tenants, trade unions, local authorities, councillors and MPs supporting the demand for the 'Fourth Option' of direct investment in council housing is growing. We are uniting all those in authorities retaining council housing, those in ALMOs who want to revert back to the council to avoid two-stage privatisation, and those facing new stock transfer, PFI or ALMO proposals. Together we are pushing the case for council housing up the political agenda.

The government has come under sustained pressure to change policy in the last year, including: evidence from the House of Commons Council Housing group (May 2005); the Audit Commission call for a 'review of housing finance (June 2005); 98 local authorities opting for stock retention (July 2005); the almost unanimous vote at the Labour Party conference (Sept 2005); the DCH Lobby of Parliament (Feb 2006), 144 MPs signing the current Early Day Motion and a growing proportion of NO votes including Sedgefield, Tower Hamlets, West Lancs, Waverley, Edinburgh, Selby, Mid-Devon, Cannock Chase and Waveney.

The need for direct investment to improve existing and build new decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing and opposition to privatisation, mass demolition schemes and sale of public land for private housing were important issues in the May 2006 local elections.

Council housing is cheaper to build, manage and maintain than the alternatives and the most efficient way to meet housing need. Shelter's research demonstrates that 72% of people interviewed put 'affordability' and a 'safe neighbourhood' before ownership.

The government's dogmatic policy of making extra investment in council housing conditional on three privatisation options of stock transfer, arms length companies or PFI, denies tenants real choice and makes no financial sense. It is a democratic disgrace that government and many local authorities continue to bully and blackmail tenants, refuse a fair and balanced debate and that 'consultation' and the conduct of ballots, do not conform to normal democratic standards.

We welcome the dialogue opened with Ministers David Miliband and Yvette Cooper and the Labour Party NEC working group set up to address the terms of the 2005 Labour Party conference motion that "calls on government to provide the 'fourth option' of direct investment to council housing as a matter of urgency."

The 2005 Labour manifesto promised: "By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities". However we are concerned that ministers are now trying to shift the focus off improving existing council homes. DCH will campaign to ensure government keeps its commitment. New council housing would be a welcome addition to, but is not a substitute for, improving the homes of "all" three million existing council tenants.

DCH will continue to build a broad based campaign around a dual strategy of helping oppose stock transfer, PFI or ALMOs at local level and linking this opposition to national initiatives to promote direct investment and increase pressure on government to agree the 'Fourth Option'.



DCH National Committee

Dave Anderson

Coventry Defend Council Housing

Frank Chance

Birmingham Defend Council Housing

Piers Corbyn

Southwark Defend Council Housing

Reg Edwards

Milton Keynes Defend Council Housing

Jean Kysow

Lewisham

John Marais

Cambridge Tenants Against Privatisation

John McDermott

Leeds UNISON

Austin Mitchell MP

Patricia Rowe

Taunton Dean Tenants Against Transfer

Eileen Short

Tower Hamlets Against Transfer

Alan Walter

Camden Defend Council Housing

Note: The DCH Constitution provides reserved places for national tenants federations in England, Scotland and Wales and affiliated national trade unions.

All meetings of the DCH National Committee are open to campaign supporters.