

DEFEND COUNCIL HOUSING

Make your voice heard

Lobby MPs for 'Fourth Option' Wednesday Feb 8, London

Council tenants, trade unionists and elected councillors are coming to London from across the UK to take part in a big rally and lobby our MPs on Feb 8.

It's a chance to hear prominent national speakers – senior MPs, tenants, councillors and trade union leaders – put the case for council housing and to share our experience.

We're coming from areas where tenants have rejected the government's three options and gone for stock retention, areas due to vote this year and from ALMOs now threatened by plans to transfer the companies into the private sector.

We won't accept the government's bullying and blackmail to privatise our homes through transfer, PFI or the two-stage ALMOs.

We want improvements but we're not prepared to trade our secure tenancies, lower rents and the right to elect our landlord for a new kitchen or bathroom. We want both!

We're winning the argument amongst politicians of all parties. The broad alliance we're building is going to secure a future for council housing – for 3 million existing council tenants and for the 1.5 million on council waiting lists in temporary accommodation or facing chronic overcrowding.

We're fighting for investment to improve existing and build new decent, affordable, secure and accountable council homes for all who need them.

Come and join us. Together we can win – for us and future generations.

No Votes in Edinburgh, West Lancs, Waverley and Tower Hamlets

Tenants reject privatisation in eight ballots before Xmas

Eleven transfer ballots were held in December 2005 and eight of them were NO votes. This is the highest proportion of NO votes in one period and shows the strength of feeling right across the UK.

Tenants in Edinburgh voted against transfer, setting a tone for the rest of Scotland. West Lancashire voted NO as did Waverley tenants in the South East.

In Tower Hamlets, London, tenants in 5 out of 7 areas rejected transfer. The council has postponed

other ballots because they will lose them now.

It leaves Ministers with a big headache. Their policy of privatisation, already unpopular, is facing growing resistance.

93 authorities have already decided to retain their homes, and of those proposing stock transfer, PFI or ALMO in the coming months, many expect stiff resistance from their tenants.

Housing Minister, Yvette Cooper has already had to admit their pres-

ent policy means they won't meet their manifesto commitment that "By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities."

Every No vote adds to the pressure for a change in government policy.

If your council is planning transfer, PFI or ALMO come on Feb 8 and contact DCH for help. By organising locally and nationally we can stop them – and win direct investment.

We're coming to the Lobby

“The impact of the Edinburgh No Vote has sent shockwaves across the whole Scottish political spectrum. It has created a debate about how to fund decent affordable council housing where none existed.

As debt write off comes from the Westminster Treasury we will be coming down so that forces north and south of the border can unite to secure a future for council housing.

Jenni Marrow,
Edinburgh tenant and
Scottish Tenants Org

My Constituency seconded the Motion at Labour Party Conference because of appeals from many Council tenants.

They were delighted with the overwhelming vote at the Labour Party Conference and look to Labour MPs to carry out that policy.

We will be attending the lobby of Parliament. This is a crucial time for the campaign in Gravesham with the ballot due to take place in June.

Leslie Christie,
Gravesham, Kent

Birmingham tenants voted 2:1 against stock transfer. We saw through their spin.

We're coming to London to win direct investment to fund the improvements we need as an alternative to mass demolition and transfer. Together we are a pow-

erful force. See you there.
Frank Chance, tenant
chair Birmingham DCH

West Lancashire Tenants and Councillors will be coming to ensure that tenants get a real choice, fair funding and the services tenants pay for - not the one sided propaganda campaign that LSVT promotes.

Only with tenants, councillors and Trades Unions coming together will we get our Labour government to here the views of the people that matter.
Cllr. Jane Roberts,
Labour Housing
spokesperson, West
Lancs

After tenants in Ellesmere Port & Neston voted last

year to reject "housing transfer" the Council and the local Labour Party had a major re-think.

They realised that the 4th Option was the only way forward.

The Council are now involved in ARCH and we are pressing them to support tenants attending the Lobby of Parliament.

Ray McHale, Ellesmere
Port & Neston DCH

Unison Cymru/Wales are proud to be part of the Lobby to Defend Council Housing. We must ensure that council housing remains where it has always been in the hands of publicly-funded Local Authorities.

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Pam Baldwin,
UNISON Cymru/Wales

Tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs demand
'FOURTH OPTION'
for
COUNCIL HOUSING
LOBBY
of
PARLIAMENT
Mass Rally at Central Hall,
Westminster, 12noon
National speakers and workshops
WEDNESDAY
8th FEBRUARY

Hear a broad platform of national speakers, attend workshops and speak to MPs of all parties on Feb 8 – make your voice heard

< Feb 8 checklist >

- Write to tenants organisations, trade unions and councillors inviting them to join a delegation from your area (leaflets and posters available)
- Publicise the event in your local press (press statement and letters)
- Ask your council to support real 'tenants participation' and 'active citizenship' by informing tenants and facilitating attendance (this is legally permissible because it is a non party event)
- Contact local trade unions for help with transport. All major unions are making local arrangements and the TUC has asked Regional TUCs to help co-ordinate transport down
- Write to your MPs and ask them to join you at the rally (Methodist Central Hall Westminster 12 – 4pm) and to meet your delegation (ideally after 3.30pm)
- Bring banners and make placards from your area/estate to decorate the hall
- Let us know if you would like to take part in the workshops: "Funding the 'Fourth Option'", "Future of ALMOs", "Post transfer/ALMO experience", "Rent Restructuring" and "Effective campaigning"

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Ministers open dialogue with campaign
Case for the 'Fourth Option' – direct investment
Stop the bullying - we demand a balanced debate

Six reasons to lobby on Feb 8 for 'Fourth Option'

1 Winning the 'fourth option' will provide a secure future for tenants in the 93 authorities who have decided on stock retention, and tenants in the 43 authorities with ALMOs who now face the threat of the council owned company being transferred into the private sector. We want to protect our security of tenure, lower rents and more accountable landlord from the mercy of market forces - private landlords and the banks.

2 Government should respect the democratic right of tenants to choose to remain with the council and get improvements to our homes and estates. Tenants in 100 authorities where councils are pushing transfer, PFI or ALMOs this year deserve a real choice.

3 Investing in council housing makes sense for the 1.5 million on council waiting lists, including 100,000 households in temporary accommodation, and many others facing chronic overcrowding.

Research by Shelter undermines the government's drive on home ownership. Ownership comes third in the priorities of those in housing need - after affordability and living in a safe neighborhood.

4 We need to defend local democracy and demand that elected local councils be allowed to get on with the job of providing an essential public service - decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing

5 Support existing council workers - and the retention of decent local authority jobs across the country - instead of TUPE transfer to private companies

6 Council housing is cheaper to build, manage and maintain than the alternatives. Housing has a huge effect on education and health. Investing in council housing would be the most cost-effective way to end the present housing crisis and help those in greatest need.

Ministers open dialogue

Local government Minister David Miliband and Housing Minister Yvette Cooper met a delegation just before Christmas. This was the first meeting with Ministers despite repeated requests in the past.

It shows that the campaign is having an impact and the growing call for the 'Fourth Option' cannot be ignored.

The House of Commons Council Housing group requested the meeting. MPs Austin Mitchell, Frank Dobson, Michael Meacher, Brian Iddon, Ken Purchase and Paul Holmes (apologies from Nick Brown), along with Alan Walter and Eileen Short from DCH attended.

Austin Mitchell, chair of the House of Commons Council Housing group, welcomed the initial exchange and promise of further meetings.

"I very much welcome this

discussion, which opens up a dialogue with ministers about the detail of council housing funding. The meeting is a positive step forward and shows recognition on the part of Ministers for the very broad support for a change in government policy.

"We are very pleased to finally get around the table and seriously engage with ministers on the key arguments we have been putting. The future of council housing cannot be ignored for the sake of 3 million council tenants and their families and all those in need of new council homes.

"The Ministers assured us that their policy is pragmatic and not driven by dogma. This commitment opens up the opportunity to explore ways to find a formula to end the bullying and blackmail and give council tenants a real choice."

'Fourth Option' affordable

Most tenants believe that all the income from our rents and money made from the sale of council homes is re-invested. But it isn't.

Each year government only allows councils to use part of this income - the rest is siphoned off. Next year government plan to withhold £1.55 billion from our rents. They have also been making an annual profit of more than half a billion pounds from 'right to buy' sales.

Stock transfer, ALMOs and PFI are a much more expensive way of improving our homes. Savings on costly setup fees, consultants and glossy PR campaigns to bully tenants could all be spent on our homes and estates.

Ending transfers would save government the cost of writing off council debts to make the sale attractive. There would also be a saving on Housing Benefit bills. Higher housing association rents cost the Treasury more.

All this money could be used to fund an 'investment allowance' to allow councils to improve our homes - which is what tenants want.

In 2002 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister floated the idea of such an 'investment allowance'.

Now is the time for Ministers to look again at this proposal and give tenants a real choice by providing the 'Fourth Option'.

Many MPs in the dark

Many MPs haven't yet studied the argument. More and more of those who have are now supporting the 'Fourth Option'. 126 MPs have signed the current Early Day Motion in Parliament ('Future of Council Housing') and a growing number of ex Ministers and other senior back bench MPs are now joining the campaign.

Come to London on Feb 8th and make sure your MP attends the meeting at Central Hall Westminster to hear the case for the 'Fourth Option' and then meets with local constituents to discuss the issues.

Let DCH know the response you get.

MONEY SIPHONED OUT OF COUNCIL HOUSING EACH YEAR

| REVENUE | CAPITAL |
|---|--|
| Government take from HRA (Guideline Rent) = £6.0 billion | RTB Receipts = £2.0 billion |
| Management & Maintenance Allowance = £3.0 billion | Basic Credit Approvals = £0.75 billion |
| Major Repairs Allowance = £1.5 billion | Usable Receipts = £0.7 billion |
| Remainder taken out of council Housing Revenue Accounts = £1.5 billion | Government Profit = £0.55 billion |

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

We're coming to Lobby too...

“ Sunderland Council has now allowed Sunderland Housing Group to dispense with the requirement to elect Tenant board members. They now hand pick Tenant representatives, so much for the Governments claim for meaningful tenant involvement.

We're coming to London to make sure MPs as well as tenants, trade unionists and councillors in other areas facing transfer hear the whole story - not just one side of it.
Mike Tansey, Sunderland Councillor

74% of tenants on the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark voted to keep their Council homes just two

years ago. There have been various attempts to frighten tenants into thinking that the estate is about to fall down and to persuade us that we live in a hell hole.

We are coming to Parliament to demand Blair keeps his promise on investment in the Aylesbury and that the Council stops trying to push tenants into deals with housing associations.

Margot Lindsey, Aylesbury tenant, Southwark

Tenants in Leeds blackmailed into voting for ALMOs have seen a massive increase in Senior Managers salaries, less accountability to both tenants and elected members.

Now one ALMO is to close offices and reduce staff numbers because of financial mismanagement.

We have to demand ALMOs revert back to the council - not get transferred into the private sector as they propose. Join us at the lobby.

John McDermott, UNISON Leeds Housing Convenor

Our campaign in Sedgefield, Tony Blair's constituency, united tenants, trade unionists and some councillors. We won a NO vote in the ballot against stock transfer last July.

If we can stop transfer in the Prime Ministers constituency then we believe an organised campaign

can stop transfer anywhere in the country.

We're coming to the lobby to share our experience and give support to those facing a similar task in other areas.

Pat McCourt, Amicus Sedgefield

Southampton tenants voted 87% in favour of stock retention - it was an overwhelming mandate to keep council housing.

I will be putting the case for government to respect our tenants choice and provide direct investment to improve homes and estates.

Cllr Paul Russell Cabinet Member for Housing & Homes, Southampton

STOP THIS DEMOCRATIC OUTRAGE Tenants demand 'fair and balanced' debate

Too often councils try and manipulate any 'consultation' with tenants. They spend our rents on a one-sided glossy PR campaign and bullying to try and get tenants to support their proposals.

Increasingly councils publish a timetable for their consultation and then ballot early - before tenants get to hear both sides of the argument.

In Tower Hamlets the council has postponed three ballots because their own market research shows they would lose the vote if they held it now. They say tenants are 'confused' and need more time.

Anti privatisation campaigners are frequently denied access to local halls for public meetings, housing staff and consultants often take down our posters and councils use their muscle with local media to keep any debate out of the press.

Where tenants have already said NO councils come back with a second 'consultation' to try and get the right result.

It's a democratic outrage. None of this would be allowed in a General or Local Election!

It's a democratic outrage! None of this would be allowed in a general or local election.

The government say they believe in 'choice in public services'. Real choice depends on there being a 'level playing field' for council housing and everyone getting to hear both sides of the debate.

Demand Ministers adopt the recommendations from the House of Commons Council Housing group's report. Guarantee all tenants a 'fair and balanced' debate, a formal ballot on a set timetable in every case.

Effective campaigning can win

Experience shows that where tenants join with unions and, where possible, councillors in a broad based campaign we can win the argument on our estates.

If your council is proposing transfer, PFI or ALMO contact DCH for help immediately.