

DEFEND COUNCIL HOUSING

Dudley & Aylesbury tenants voted NO

Turn up the heat

as government shows signs of pressure



2001 ended with tenants in Dudley and Southwark's Aylesbury Estate decisively voting against transfer. A new 'right to borrow' is included in the Local Government Finance White Paper and is set to become law by or before 2004. This is despite Housing Minister, Lord Falconer and most housing pundits trying to bury the idea.

In spring 2000 the government had one single minded policy - dubbed 'the end of council housing'. But they haven't pulled it off. They spend millions selling privatisation and telling us there is no alternative, but they are losing important ballots. Their attacks on council housing are deeply unpopular.

Though we haven't managed to stop all the transfers we have pushed council housing up the political agenda. Many people said we would never change government policy, but are showing that four million council tenants, trade unions, MPs, councillors and other campaigners around the country are a powerful force.

Today the future of council housing hangs in the balance. The new right to

borrow is not enough in itself but it shows the government can be forced to make important concessions. New, additional public subsidy is now budgeted for housing - this negates the argument that money is simply not available. The problem is clearly not financial but political. If the money is available to bribe councils to privatise (by writing off overhanging debt) then it should be made available to all councils. This would solve the investment crisis and allow all councils to carry out the repairs and improvements we need.

Government is clearly split, and trying to face in two directions at once. They are twisting councils' arms to crank up the pace: the Community Task Force is being sent around the country to professionalise council pro-transfer campaigns. At the same time, to split us and head off the opposition, the government is offering further inducements to councils to adopt an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO/ALC) formula.

It's the old divide and rule strategy using carrot and stick. ALMOs will allow them to complete their privatisation ambition in a second phase once the opposition has been defeated.

This is a back-door attempt at two-stage privatisation. We can defeat it - and win the investment we need without swallowing the ALMO/ALC blackmail.

Already we have won the right to borrow. We need to keep up the pressure for direct investment in council housing - with no strings attached.

Unite to Stand Up for Council Housing

- Respond now to the Local Government Finance White Paper, we should demand a full right to borrow for all councils from 2002, no siphoning off of rent and no blackmail to set up ALMOs. A real 'level playing field' for council housing.

- Tenants and unions call for more public investment in council housing with no strings attached, in the Public Service Spending Review

- Raise the issues on every doorstep. Help campaigns put the case against privatisation in areas facing transfer ballots this spring

Turn up the Heat

- Raise our *Manifesto for Council Housing* with all candidates in May's local elections



December's Transfer Ballots

The future of council housing hangs in the balance

	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>
Dudley	56%	44%
Aylesbury	73%	27%
St Helens	26%	74%
Langley	10%	90%

Dudley and Aylesbury show what can be done!

DCH NATIONAL CONFERENCE
FEB 9TH, BIRMINGHAM

Credentials: £5 tenants; £12.50 trade unionists

National speakers from the tenants and trade union movement, MPs and councillors plus workshops on ● Housing Finance; ● Organising a successful anti-transfer campaign ● The Case for Council Housing ● WTO GATS and housing privatisation at home

ORGANISE A DELEGATION OF TENANTS & TRADE UNIONISTS FROM YOUR AREA

Transfer ballots this spring... Learn the lessons from successful campaigns

What works...

United Campaign

Tenants organisations and campaigns, local authority trade union, sympathetic councillors and others need to work together.

Think about who you can get involved. Contact every tenants, trade union and community organisation in the area. Draw up a list of well known people who could be invited to support the campaign - MPs, councillors, senior union officials, celebrities and ask them whether they will speak at a big public meeting. Agree a clear campaign plan and think of ways of getting the highest possible profile. Delegate responsibilities for each area of activity (leaflets and posters, press, public meetings, car cavalcade and loudspeakers, lobbying MPs and councillors, fundraising, liaising with the national campaign, etc).

On the Doorstep

This is the core of the campaign. Knock on doors, visit tenant reps, deliver leaflets, put up posters. Build up a network, so someone is responsible for leafleting and talking to people on every block or landing

Challenge every argument

A good local leaflet needs to take apart the council's case. Carefully investigate how much they plan to spend on improvements and exactly what they

Transfer ballots due Spring 2002

Ealing	900
Hackney	900
Harrow	518
Merton	9612
Waltham Forest	2613
Birmingham	88000
Bradford	26136
Carlisle	7687
Crewe	6000
Herefordshire	5780
Liverpool	13182
Manchester	2400

Contact DCH if you can help campaign in any of these areas

are guaranteeing to everyone and by when. Find out what the the RSL's record is on rent increases, repairs and carrying out its promises in other areas. Check facts and figures and all the local vested interests. Who are the board members and who are their bankers? How much will new directors be paid? Are senior councillors or housing managers lined up for the top jobs?

What's the Alternative

Spell out what council tenants have that is worth defending - why the principles of decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing are worth safeguarding for our children's generation. Be clear what investment tenants really want to fight for and argue how that could be financed.

Our response to the Government Finance White Paper

Unite all those who support council housing around a tenants' response to the *Local Government Finance White Paper*. This has a section on Housing Finance (part 2 chapter 5) www.local-regions.dtlr.gov.uk/sll/pdf/wp_part2.pdf

✓ We are glad to see that government admit at last that council housing is largely self-financing.

✓ We welcome the right to borrow for councils as a breakthrough. It should be introduced for all councils from 2002.

✓ Rent levels should be set locally, as a democratic right in an accountable housing service - and any agreed increases must be spent on our homes.

✓ We demand a commitment that all rent income will be used for the management, maintenance and improvement of council housing. So-called 'surpluses' must be invested in our homes. Sharing between areas is fine. But no more rent income should go to subsidise Treasury housing benefit or other budgets. Not a penny of our rent must go for 'other expenditure outside the HRA' (5.14 p95).

✓ Councils must spend all rent and HRA income on an agreed investment programme - no 'siphoning off'.

✓ Reject the 'carrot and stick' blackmail to set up Arms Length Organisations (ALMOs or ALCs).

Put council housing at the centre of the Public Spending Review

In the Autumn the Government announces future public spending plans.

Housing Associations, councils and financiers are lobbying like mad for what they want.

Housing associations have already won promises that they don't have to stick to rent guidelines!

Who is lobbying for council housing? We need a forceful, united argument for 'direct investment in council housing - with no strings attached'.

● Invest new money in council housing - if public money can be made available to subsidise privatisation (through debt write off, redemption charges, etc) we want at least the same invested in improving council housing.

● The White paper admits that council housing pays for itself - so stop undermining us and put back some of the £10 billion siphoned out over the last ten years through Daylight Robbery.

● Invest in good quality low-rent council housing to stop housing benefit bills soaring.

✓ LOBBYING FOR COUNCIL HOUSING

Get your tenants association, Fed or union branch to back these demands and formally support a joint submission to Gordon Brown's spending review. Contact DCH for further information.