

## **A new future for social housing under Labour.**

By Steve Hilditch

Labour's excellent Green Paper on social housing, launched by Jeremy Corbyn and John Healey on April 19 2018, is a strong response to both the appalling Grenfell fire and the Tories virtual ending of social housing.

As a Green Paper, 'Housing for the many' both sets out the clear direction of Labour policy and seeks further input from Labour members as the policy is developed heading towards the next general election.

The full document can be found via this link: ['Housing for the many'](#) and Jeremy's speech can be found [here](#).

*Jeremy Corbyn answers questions from journalists and the housing world at the launch.*



The Green Paper traces the history of social housing and its importance in meeting housing need, the failure of successive governments to invest adequately in new social housing since 1980, and the Tories' efforts to remove it entirely since 2010.

The key policies proposed by the Green Paper include:

- ✓ Recognising that building market homes alone will not tackle the housing affordability crisis, Labour will gear up to building 100,000 genuinely affordable homes a year, achieving **1 million over a decade**. This is around six times the amount being achieved now and 'would reach levels last achieved in 1978'.
- ✓ There will be a new definition of 'affordable' housing to tackle the increasing bizarre use of the word by the Conservatives. Labour will return to the key notion of 'social rent' with rents set by the existing national formula and will scrap the Tories' bogus 'Affordable Rent' (with

rents up to 80% of market rents) in favour of a new 'Living Rent' linked to one-third of local earnings aimed at key workers and people on moderate incomes.

- ✓ The Green Paper emphasises that building social housing makes good economic sense and will improve the public finances in the long term by reducing the cost of housing benefit.
- ✓ Labour will act to stem the loss of existing social rented homes from the stock. This will include ending the scandalous practice of converting social rent homes to the much higher 'Affordable Rent' when they become empty, suspending the right to buy, and abandoning the Tories proposed policy of selling 'high value' council homes to fund a new housing association right to buy.
- ✓ Labour's investment policies will also include lifting the council HRA cap to prudential levels, and reviewing the way borrowing is recorded in the national accounts. New development on public land will be required to meet affordable housing requirements. Housing associations will be regarded as a key part of finding the solution to the affordable housing crisis, but there will be a renewed expectation that they will have social purpose at their core.
- ✓ Tenant empowerment will be a key feature of the new approach. A new national voice for tenants will be established, tenants' groups will be actively supported, and there will be consultation on a new requirement that tenants should sit on housing association boards. The regulatory regime will be strengthened to improve consumer standards and tenant involvement. Tenants' rights will be strengthened – with the ban on long-term tenancies ended.
- ✓ The plans will herald the start of a major shift away from personal subsidies towards investment subsidies – from 'benefits to bricks'. Money will go towards ensuring affordable homes are built, not letting rents rip and letting housing benefit 'take the strain'. Critically, Labour will restore the £4 billion housing investment programme that was in place in 2010 and look to negotiate a new 10 year rent settlement to keep rents affordable for tenants as well as supporting a sustained investment programme and a new 'decent homes 2' programme.
- ✓ In private developments, Labour will remove the 'viability loophole' which allows developers to dodge affordable housing obligations and will change other planning rules which inhibit the provision of affordable homes.
- ✓ In regeneration, there is a repeated commitment to a ballot when demolition is proposed. There will be a minimum requirement that there should be no loss of social rent homes and new guarantees for existing residents.
- ✓ One in eight social homes still fail the 'decent homes' standard despite the £20 billion investment improving 1.4 million homes made by the last Labour government. There is a new crisis – across all tenures, but here we are addressing social housing – in terms of fire safety and the urgent need to secure significant improvements following the appalling Grenfell fire. Grenfell survivors contributed to Labour's review, and the document commits Labour to installing sprinklers in high rise flats.
- ✓ Although not a paper that focuses on Labour's social security policies, there are specific commitments to end the hated bedroom tax, protect housing benefit for the under 21s, and to pause and fix Universal Credit.
- ✓ There will be new commitments to improve design and reduce carbon emissions, together with new minimum space standards and a further extension of the Lifetime Homes standard.
- ✓ There will be a proper focus on housing through a new stand alone Ministry and external checks on the progress Ministers are making towards meeting the housing targets.

The Party is still open to comment and revision of the policies before they are finally agreed. Everyone is encouraged to address the outstanding questions that the document highlights, which include:

- ✓ Do you agree with Labour's new affordable housing definition?

- ✓ Are there further specific steps that could get councils, housing associations and others building more genuinely affordable homes in all parts of the country?
- ✓ Do you agree with stopping the loss of affordable homes through right to buy, conversions to 'affordable rent' and the forced sale of council homes?
- ✓ How can Labour ensure that estate regeneration maximises affordable housing and improves local areas, including in low demand areas?
- ✓ What more can we do to make affordable housing more energy efficient and to improve fire safety as part of a new 'Decent Homes 2' standard?
- ✓ Do you agree with our proposals to increase social landlords' accountability to tenants?
- ✓ What more could be done to ensure there is sufficient specialist affordable housing for groups including those who are elderly, disabled or homeless?

Responses can be submitted by to: [socialhousingreview@labour.org.uk](mailto:socialhousingreview@labour.org.uk)