

Who's who in LHGs Executive

Janet Berry

Janet is a council tenant, and live in the South East. Janet has been actively involved in tenants' associations and tenant participation activities over a considerable period of time. From 2012 to 2016 she was a Councillor on Winchester City Council. Janet has worked for many years in the field of community development amongst communities with high levels of social housing.

John Bevan (Vice Chair and Auditor)

John was previously Cabinet Member for Housing on Haringey Council, and Design Champion for Haringey emphasising improved housing design and maintenance. He is Chair of LHC (formerly London Housing Consortium), a non-profit making group specialising in housing procurement issues for social landlords.

Wendy Cocks

Wendy has personal background in social housing, and has worked in both social and private housing sectors, particularly housing for older people. Her particular interests are in the design, build and adaptability of housing and Neighbourhoods. Wendy was elected to Rochdale Borough Council for the first time in 2016.

John Cotton

John was first elected to Birmingham City Council in 1999 and has been closely involved in housing policy issues throughout his time as a Labour Councillor. He has served as Cabinet Member with responsibility for housing and also for health and social care. He currently chairs the Council's Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

Ed Derrick (Newsletter Editor)

Ed is a former Member of Newcastle City Council (1983-1995), and has been active in the Labour Party at Branch, CLP and Regional level since 1974. He is now retired after a lifetime in public housing policy and administration, and does voluntary work with a housing association and local community groups in Newcastle upon Tyne. He is a Fellow of the CIH, formerly chair of the North East Branch and a life member of Unison.

Katherine Dunne (Secretary)

Katherine is Cabinet member for Housing at the London Borough of Hounslow, and chairs the Hounslow Together Welfare Reform Group. She is a strong advocate of women's rights and volunteers with the Labour Women's Network. She is a trade unionist and works for a European science programme.

Paul Eastwood (Chair)

Paul has worked in housing since 1980, and has been a Fellow of the CIH since 1993. He held senior roles with four local authorities, and has been CEO of 5 housing associations, as well as serving 2 terms as an Elected Member. He was secretary of LHG from 2010 to 2016, becoming chair earlier in 2016. He currently works as CEO of a small housing and care provider in Hertfordshire.

Alex Heslop

Alex has worked in the housing sector for over 16 years for a range of local authorities and housing associations; he has a particular interest in housing co-operatives. He has been a front line estate manager, a local councillor, a local authority liaison officer for Tenant Management Organisations, as well as managing a Tenant Management Co-operative. He has been a member of LHG Executive since 2014.

Frank Hont

Frank is a Labour Councillor in Liverpool and Cabinet Member for Housing. He worked in both private and public sectors before becoming North West Regional Secretary of Unison in 2003. He served on the Labour Government Commission on Integration and Cohesion in 2006-07 and was a member of the Liverpool fairness Commission.

Ross Houston (Treasurer)

Ross has been LHG Treasurer since 2009 and is a LHG London branch EC member. He has been a Councillor in London Borough of Barnet since 2006, and is Currently Deputy Leader of the Labour Group and Housing spokesperson, Vice Chair of Barnet Labour Housing Commission and Barnet Group/Homes board member. Senior manager in a housing association. Vice-chair of West Euston Partnership, board member Camden's Third Age Project and of Lee Valley Regional Park Authority.

Heather Johnson

Heather has been a Councillor in Camden since 1994 and is currently Chair of the Planning Committee. She has served as Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Scrutiny Chair and Vice-Chair of Housing under the previous Committee structure. In her professional career she has delivered advice services and policy products particularly around private rented sector and welfare benefits.

David Leah (Membership)

David grew up in council housing in Manchester before moving south for study and work. He is active in Housing co-operatives and was a Councillor in Lewisham Borough Council from 1986 to 1994, Chairing the Housing Development Committee. His work is in development and delivery of public housing, and has served

Kerry Pollard (Press)

At our Conference fringe meeting in Liverpool, John Healey said "LHG won't seem like LHG without Kerry Pollard". We would all agree with that. But while Kerry has stood down as LHG's longest serving Chair, he remains an active member of the Executive.

NB Individuals must be members of the Labour Party and agree to be bound by Labour Party rules and the LHG constitution

HOUSING



December 2016
Editor - Ed Derrick

Honorary Patrons: Lord Rory Kennedy and Nicky Gavron

The Newsletter from Labour Housing Group

Editorial

Back in 1984, Labour Housing Group published 'Right to a Home'*, in which we examined the housing problems of the time and set out our ideas as to how they could be addressed. It comes as no surprise to see that the first chapter was entitled "The Growing Housing Crisis" - for, then as now, the country was a few years into the tenure of a reactionary, divisive and destructive Tory government, then as now driven by an ideological obsession with 'the market' and a visceral loathing of anything which smacks of public, social or co-operative endeavour.

For in thirty years the Tories have learned nothing - long before Theresa May accurately identified them as The Nasty Party, the rest of us knew them as The Stupid Party. Like someone intent on demonstrating the nature of lunacy - keeping on making the same mistake in the hope of a different outcome - they carry on obsessively trying to force people into home ownership they can barely afford, whilst at the same time forcing down their incomes and financial security - or else forcing them into a private rented sector which they neither want nor can afford, and pouring public money into the pockets of developers, landlords and associated spivs and racketeers.

The outcome of this stupidity is the disaster daily experienced by millions of people in this country - still one of the wealthiest in the world - of a life of economic and other exploitation in insecure, inadequate and overpriced housing - or increasingly of outright homelessness, whilst the Government's wealthy friends in the international kleptocracy in the City stash their millions in absurdly overpriced apartments and houses in what were once areas where real people lived and worked out their real lives. It would be laughable if it wasn't such a damned disgrace.

Right to a Home? No chance with this lot in power - the only rights they are interested in are those of money and property.

There has recently been a modest relaxation of its posture by the Government - welcome but inadequate given the scale of the problems which need to be addressed and still not evidence that the Tories understand that millions of people face massive housing problems as a direct result of the decisions the Government has made.

In this issue we continue to address the question: What can Labour do differently today?

In LHG we do not pretend to have all the answers, but we do claim to understand some basic principles - such as the duty of Government to ensure that everyone has access to a decent home of their own, where they want it, and of a tenure and price they can afford; or such as the duty of Government to prevent extortion and profiteering by unscrupulous businesses; or the fact that massive differences in wealth and circumstances across society are a recipe for disaster, one that will most surely hurt the weakest and most vulnerable first and worst.

What we in LHG want to do is to encourage debate and the exchange of ideas - so in this issue we continue our look at what Labour in power locally is doing and plans to do, notwithstanding the dire financial circumstances affecting local government and housing associations, with contributions from Birmingham, Greater Manchester and Liverpool - some of the great cities where Labour is working to offset the worst effects of the present Government.

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Conference Report

I had the privilege of being the Labour Housing Group Delegate to Conference this year in Liverpool. The conference itself was of course overshadowed by the Special Conference on Saturday 24th September 2016, which announced the results of the Leadership Election. Whatever issues there may be between the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Leadership, the LHG is living proof of a vibrant socialist society open to all strands of opinion within the Party. In fact Housing is one of the key issues that tends to unite all party members, because who can deny the fact that we need to be building at least a million homes over the next 5 years, if we are to have any chance of solving the current housing crisis.

The London Labour Party Reception on the Saturday evening was a good place to begin the conference, with newly elected Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, the keynote speaker. The crisis in London's housing market played a significant part throughout Sadiq's campaign. Initiatives that are to be implemented include the following:

- Homes for Londoners – a new agency to fast-track the development of genuinely affordable housing in the Capital.
- Investment in new build – at least 80,000 homes a year.
- London Living Rent.
- London wide not for profit Lettings Agency

I also happened to bump into Jeremy Corbyn during the Reception and mentioned that I was the Labour Housing Group Delegate, to which he hinted that Housing was going to form a major part of his Leader's speech!

Labour Housing Group has traditionally held its fringe meeting on the Sunday evening of conference; this year we were in the majestic Cunard Building and had thought provoking contributions from John Healey (who at the time of the conference had resigned as shadow housing minister, but who is now back in the shadow cabinet with the housing brief again), Councillor Frank Hont (Portfolio holder for Housing, Liverpool City Council), Jenny Osbourne (TPAS) and Councillor John Cotton (Portfolio holder for Housing, Birmingham City Council). John Healey, a long standing supporter of LHG, slated the Tory Housing record on new build, as fewer homes are being built than at any time since the 1920s! John Cotton and Frank Hont gave practical examples of what steps Labour in power locally can take to help alleviate local housing markets. Frank expressed a concern that many housing associations seem to have lost their roots, whilst Jenny strongly advocated the benefits of involving tenants and residents in procurement. This is the second year in a row that Unison Labour Link have sponsored the LHG fringe; we look forward to maintaining a close link in the coming years.

Teresa Pierce, the Shadow Housing Minister (at the time of the conference), addressed the Labour Party Conference on Monday 26th September 2016, committing the Party to building a million new homes over the next parliament (with half of those homes being for social rent), making three year tenancies the norm in the Private Rented Sector as well as promoting not for profit Lettings Agencies. She ended her speech by calling for a suspension of the Right to Buy. I was fortunate to be the last delegate to speak in the Housing Debate, managing to get a good plug for our Benefits to Bricks campaign!

If you haven't ever been to conference before, do consider putting yourself forward

Alex Heslop

LHG's Programme for 2017

Here are some dates of LHG events planned for 2017 for your Diary:

- Saturday 20th May: Annual General Meeting - Guest Speaker David Orr
- Saturday 10th June: (TBC) - Policy Away Day in the North East
- Sunday 24th September: Brighton: Party Conference Fringe Meeting
- Saturday 28th October: (TBC) - Policy Away Day in Birmingham

There will be five regular meetings of the Executive - these are usually held in London - and we plan to produce three newsletters in the course of 2017

Greater Manchester is a diverse, varied conurbation and housing markets vary hugely even within our borders. We don't envy or want to replicate the negative impacts of high pressure housing markets that colleagues in London and elsewhere are wrestling with.

So in one sense we're lucky that building new homes that working people can afford to buy or rent is a realistic ambition in Greater Manchester. We can and must contribute to achieving those national housebuilding targets, and our communities will benefit directly from doing so, and from the thousands of jobs that work will create.

But lower prices and values bring their own challenges – they can make it much harder to generate the upfront investment needed to turn a brownfield site into a viable development opportunity, to remediate the land or connect into infrastructure.

Devolution is a journey not a fixed point in time and that's why we're pushing Government hard on the need for them to help us invest in bringing those sites to the point where they're viable, so we can work with landowners, housing associations and developers to bring them forward, or directly commission new homes that we know our residents want to see built for themselves and their children.

We can make more happen, if Government gives us the flexibility to commission more new homes, work with developers and investors, work with housing associations and, with a long term view from Government, invest to tackle the many brownfield sites that can produce sustainable homes in our communities but are currently stalled and neglected.

The £300 million GM Housing Fund is already making a contribution to speeding up the delivery of new homes by private sector partners, and that will continue over the ten year life of the Fund. But that is only one small part of the equation – we need more tools if we're going to build the homes our kids and grandkids need. And at the same time make sure that the supporting infrastructure such as school places, roads, public transport, green spaces are invested in so that we are not only building new homes but building and strengthening communities. A place with a plan is a place with a future.

Richard Farnell

Richard is the Labour Leader of Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's lead on Housing and Planning

Elected Mayors - Labour Housing in Action **Greater Manchester - Homes for All**

As we all know England is currently suffering from a housing crisis: quite frankly we don't build enough decent affordable homes for people and haven't done so for decades. What we are talking about here is a basic human right for shelter. With families crying out for homes that their children can afford in places they want to live.

Nationally there are some big targets and numbers and it's easy to get distracted by these or in blaming the planning system again. We are dealing with a market failure and an injustice between generations, with young people today denied the chance to own a place called home and denied the opportunity that many existing homes owners have. For those renting by choice or a lack of they too are denied the certainty of knowing that they won't be turfed out in the weeks ahead.

We can't rely on the same unjust market forces to provide the entire solution. When something is undeniably wrong we need to step up and provide help.

Looking at completions, on the 15th November the Government announced that the number of new homes has risen 11% in a year. In Greater Manchester this means:

- ★ 6,190 net housing completions in 2015/16
- ★ An increase of 14.2% on the previous year
- ★ The highest net completion figure since 2008/09
- ★ The highest contributors of course are Manchester (1,760) and Salford (1,100)

This is good news but is still well short of our annual need which is 11,365 and masks the fact that, as is the case nationally, there has been a large drop in affordable housing completions in Greater Manchester.

So what are we doing about this – do we have a plan? Our new Plan the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework sets out a trajectory to deliver 227,300 new homes by 2035, and while the huge majority of those will be in the existing urban area (72%), it's still not enough, and so our plan is to allocate a series of Green Belt areas to well planned development. But we are not abandoning brownfield sites – far from it.

Despite a lot of hard work by councils, the Homes and Community Agency our partners, and successes in increasing investment in residential development in and around the city centre in particular, we are still developing about a half of the new homes we should be delivering across Greater Manchester.

We're planning for growth through the Spatial Framework and alongside that we need fresh thinking about how we deliver the homes our communities aspire to, and how that matches with what they can afford. We need new ways of moving from renting toward home ownership, of bridging the deposit gap that is such a challenge for many of our residents – but we also need to help them to raise their income, accessing better jobs and raising their skills.



*John Healey MP Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, speaking
at LHGs fringe meeting at the 2016 Party Conference*

Message from John Healey MP, Labour Shadow Secretary of State for Housing

It's good to be back leading for Labour on housing at Westminster as Shadow Secretary of State for Housing. Concern about housing is at the highest it's been for 40 years, and after six years of Conservative ministers calling the shots it's simply unarguable that the housing pressures people face, right across the country, have got much worse.

Housebuilding during the six years of David Cameron's premiership was the lowest level under any prime minister since 1923. Rough sleeping has doubled. Private rents have risen faster than incomes. The number of new government-funded social rented homes has fallen from 40,000 in 2009 under Labour to just 1,000 last year with the Tories in charge. And housing benefit has risen by more than £4,000,000,000 a year in cash terms, despite a series of punitive cuts.

I look forward to working with you all as we take the fight to the Tories and set out Labour's vision for how things could be different. In doing so I'll be talking up Labour's record, both in national government and in local government. I believe our national political recovery will be based on our local mayors, councillors and councils because you can help give people a Labour voice, when there may not be a Labour MP for 50 or 100 miles, and help show the difference Labour can make to people's lives when we're in power. In taking on this task, I'll be working with a great shadow housing team in the Commons: Andy Slaughter MP, Roberta Blackman-Woods MP, Ruth Cadbury MP and Chris Matheson MP as my Parliamentary Private Secretary.

John Healey MP

Homelessness - Labour Housing in Action

“HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION BILL”

This Bill will not change homelessness

Labour Housing Group welcomes the recent support in parliament for the Homelessness Reduction Bill.

However the idea that simply giving 'advice' to people who are either facing homelessness, already without a home or sleeping rough, is the sole answer to solving the homeless crisis is just not credible.

The truth is that without the necessary national financial support for a much increased house building programme, then the scarce housing that is available will inevitably result in other people in need of re-housing being pushed even further down the 'waiting list' It is clear that we are in the middle of a housing crisis manufactured by Government. No amount of rearranging of priorities is going to help those in need of housing without a substantial increase in the number of homes built.

Building 300,000 homes would add 2% to GDP - a sound economic argument for building. Allowing Councils to borrow against the value of their stock and to pay that back over the next 25 years will enable them to build homes that will last 100 years, serving several generations.

The latest suggestion from Government is the building of 100,000 'prefabs' – done properly this will help. Use of offsite construction techniques devised by the Building Research Establishment (being built by the million by the Chinese Government) with the offsite factories sited in unemployment black spot areas. Once the base of the homes is in place the rest of the new home can be built in a few days. But Councils need the freedom to get on and do this.

We are currently borrowing to fund a huge housing benefit bill – not one home built as a result. There is a better way – and Councils across the country are crying out for Government to let them get on with it.

It's also vital that the Government fully funds local authorities so they can meet the new duties in the Homelessness Reduction Bill. Councils like Labour run Birmingham are already fighting hard against a tide of rising homelessness, with thousands of families stuck in temporary accommodation and more people needing help each week. This means that budgets are overstretched already so it is imperative that Government fully funds the new duties in the Bill.

The Homelessness Reduction Bill is welcomed, but it has to be backed by the cash and the commitment to help build the new homes our country desperately needs, if it is going to make a real impact on the homeless crisis.

This is the text of a press statement issued on 14th November 2016 by Kerry Pollard and John Cotton

Tackling Homelessness in Liverpool

At a time when Local Government continues to face immense financial pressures, our communities and citizens are dealing with massive challenges of their own. Nowhere is this dual pressure felt more acutely than in homeless services.

Liverpool City Council's Housing Options Service is contacted on average by 550 individual households each month at risk of homelessness. These households are facing issues such as debt, rent arrears, neighbour disputes, threat of repossession, poor landlord practice, overcrowding and domestic violence. All circumstances are unique to that individual household and their resources. As the burdens of welfare reform and a challenging economy for many people continue to build, the fear is that there will be an increasing demand for an already pressed service. This is against a backdrop of a further financial saving for the Council of £90 million; in addition to the existing budget reduction of £330 million.

However, even against this perfect storm of increased demand with reduced resources, the Council continues to try and prevent homelessness whenever possible. This is the basis for Liverpool's new Homeless Strategy launched in September 2016. While every individual circumstance will be different, it is usually better for people to remain in their own home with their links to family, schools, community and employment. It is also financially beneficial for Local Authorities to prevent homelessness, with the average cost of temporary accommodation being over £300 per week per household.

So, how do we go forward when the challenge feels insurmountable? One key principle has to be partnerships – the foundation underpinning Liverpool's Homeless Strategy is that homelessness is everyone's business! That means health, housing associations, private landlords, Job Centre Plus, advice agencies, voluntary sector, the Police, businesses and the public. Everyone has risk factors that may push them into housing need at some point, so all agencies which may come into contact with these households have a responsibility to be able to offer a basic level of housing advice and know how to refer onto specialist agencies, such as Housing Options. This will both promote earlier intervention but also take the pressure off statutory agencies. Most partners in Liverpool are on board with this message; however it is still a huge task to make this real. It will not happen by osmosis –this requires resources to make it happen... to co-ordinate agencies, produce material and train staff. And let's not forget that most partners are under their own pressures.

Yet as challenging as the climate is, Councils are going to have to take these measures with the likely introduction of the Homeless Reduction Bill which strengthens the homeless prevention duties. Very few people in the sector will argue against the principles in the Bill; however without a clear and robust plan about how (or if) the Government intend to resource it or how they will address the affordable housing crisis; the existing issues will be compounded – for both Councils and communities.

In the meantime, against overwhelming odds over-stretched Housing Options staff in Liverpool will continue to try and support the 550 households per month to have a safe and affordable home.

Frank Hont