

LABOUR HOUSING GROUP POLICY DAY

How should a Labour Government tackle the current housing mess?

Saturday 10th June 2017, 10.30 am to 4.00 pm
The Dolphin Centre, Darlington, DL1 5RP

Speakers include Roberta Blackman-Woods MP (Shadow Minister for Housing) and Anna Round (IPPR North)

Workshop Sessions will cover

- How to rapidly increase the supply of truly affordable housing for rent
- Tackling rents, tenure and standards in the private rented sector
- Developing a range of housing options for older people and those with particular needs
- Affordable housing - what should that mean?
- Housing and Devolution - making devolution work to meet housing needs and standards

Open to all Labour Party Members

£ 10.00 (full), £ 8.00 (concessions) including meat-free lunch and drinks

Book through: billetto.co.uk/e/labour-housing-group-policy-day-2017-tickets-188823

Join Us!

Join Labour Housing Group and help us take the fight for decent housing for everyone to the Government

We have enclosed a number of LHG membership application forms with this edition of our Newsletter. Please encourage your Party colleagues to consider joining us in the fight for better housing for all, for the Right to a Home. You have to be a full individual member of the Labour Party to join LHG - that's all!

LHG Branches

For many years, LHG's constitution has included guidance on how Branches of LHFG can be formed. The guidance is not overly prescriptive, and it is good to see active branches operating in London and North East England. We are also hopeful that branches will be formed in the North West and South West during the coming year.

At its most recent meeting, LHG's Executive recognised that it may be helpful to revisit the part of the Constitution which deals with branches. Some proposed additional wording will be brought for discussion to the AGM on May 20th, with the intention of updating some text, which needs agreement. If you have thoughts on any of the above please do get in touch with me at paulre55@hotmail.co.uk, or our Secretary, Katherine Dunne, at ksdunne@gmail.com.

Paul Eastwood, Chair of Labour Housing Group

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

The opinions expressed in articles in this Newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Labour Housing Group

HOUSING



April 2017

Editor - Ed Derrick

Honorary Patrons: Lord Roy Kennedy and Nicky Gavron

The Newsletter from Labour Housing Group

Editorial

It is important that Labour does not fall into the trap of allowing the Government to set the terms of debate about housing. Of course we have to have ripostes to the Government's useless policies and dodgy claims - doing so is part of our role as Opposition in parliament. But our wider role and responsibility is to present our alternative vision - of housing policies based on the needs of people and not finance, on collaboration rather than exploitation, on fairness and equity as opposed to privilege and inequality.

So in this edition we take a further look at what is being done, and will be done, in the great cities where Labour is in power, through the offices of our elected mayors. We also feature proposals to address the problems of leaseholders, older home owners and disrepair, and offer a contribution to the Co-operative Party's housing policy review.

Below is the final notice for the 2017 AGM of Labour Housing Group.

Ed Derrick

2017 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday, 20 May 2017, beginning at 11:00 (registration and refreshments available from 10.30)
at Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1E 9JE (opposite St. Pancras Station)

Agenda

Guest Speakers:

- John Healey, M.P., Shadow Housing Minister
- David Orr, Chief Executive, the National Housing Federation
- Liz Davies, the Society of Labour Lawyers

- 1 Chair's Report
- 2 Report on the election of the EC for 2016-17
- 3 Executive Report
- 4 Financial Statement and Auditor's Report
- 5 Reports from Branches
- 6 Budget for 2017-18
- 7 Report from 2016 Annual Conference Delegate
- 8 Membership Subscriptions
- 9 Appointment of Auditors
- 10 Resolutions

LHG's Constitution states that any paid up member (individual or organisation) may submit a Resolution for discussion at the AGM. Each Resolution should be no more than 200 words in length, and should be concerned with a contemporary topic that is relevant to the objectives of LHG.

The deadline for receipt of Resolutions is Monday, 15 May 2017.

Please email any Resolutions to me at ksdunne@gmail.com

Following lunch, there will be two presentations and discussion sessions - one led by Dermot McKibbin, and another to be confirmed.

Katherine Dunne, LHG Secretary

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Dealing with the Tories' Housing Crisis - Bristol Fashion

With average house prices over £ 1/4m, and private rents over £1,000 per month it is hardly surprising that housing was one of the biggest issues in the 2016 Mayoral election in Bristol, and is a top priority for the new Mayor's administration. Our headline pledge was to increase home building from the low under the previous independent Mayor, from 460 to 2000 per year by 2020, with 800 affordable.

Labour took majority control of the council as well as the Mayor in the election and arrived with a well-developed housing strategy. This had been built in the months prior to the election with a twin tracked approach of policy groups for party members and roundtable events with the building industry. The first major decision of the administration was to take 80 hectares of council-owned land off the market, to enable the council to release the land for development in a controlled way rather than fuelling land speculation.

As cabinet member I set four priorities for the first year in office:

1. Increase the volume of housing development, affordable housing delivery and establishing a council owned delivery company
2. Reducing the number of empty council properties from 550 to 250 (already down to 406 by January 2017)
3. Reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation (unfortunately still over 500 in January 2017)
4. Improve standards in the private rented sector and adopting an ethical charter for the sector.

Year two priorities will add to this list by establishing a citywide tenants' federation, encompassing all tenures and reviewing who is social housing for and how is it allocated?

Underlying our work is the creation of balanced communities across the city. This has already put us into some rather intense meetings with developers about affordable housing contributions. The planning system is producing around half of our policy requirement and we are using our land ownership to lever new affordable and social housing. As a stock retaining authority we are also maintaining a council home building programme and are about to start the city's largest new build development for three decades.

Labour has also ensured that the voices of those failed by the housing market as well as those of developers, investors and other housing interests are heard in the council. We are about to hold our second 'Big Housing Conversation' in partnership with a private tenants campaign group ACORN. This brings together officers, politicians and tenants/homeless people. We are also working with community led organisations to put more housing development under community control.

Despite the eye-watering cuts in our finances we are investing additional revenue into an enlarged cross departmental housing delivery team to get more homes built. The mayor has also spearheaded work with the faith community to get more buildings open for rough sleepers in the City.

Outside of the years of the Second World War, we probably have to go back to before 1919 to find a worse operating environment for delivering social housing. In Bristol our housing policy is one of our flagship activities and one which our administration will be judged on in our next elections in 2020.

Paul Smith, Cabinet Member, Homes and Communities, Bristol City Council

Co-operative Party Housing Policy Consultation A personal response

The Co-operative Party has launched a formal consultation on its own housing policy and is seeking contributions from individuals and organisations within the Co-operative Movement. The deadline for submissions is 30th June 2017.

The key questions to consider from the consultation document are as follows:

- *• What is your local communities' experience of housing?
- How could housing be improved in your local community?
- How could co-operative values and principles be a stronger feature of the UK housing sector and what benefits would this bring?
- What barriers are there to achieving a more co-operative housing sector?
- How could national legislation and local government support be changed to support co-operative housing?

There are many forms of co-operative housing in the UK: Short Life Co-operatives, Tenant Management Co-operatives, fully mutual ownership co-operatives, Community Land Trusts, Co-housing communities, Mutual and tenant owned stock transfer housing associations.

The big question for me, as someone who has worked with housing co-operatives for a number of years is this. Have Councils, Governments past and present, the devolved administrations in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, really done enough to promote, develop and support the growth of co-operative initiatives? Support for co-ops tends to cut across the political spectrum, yet it is still the case that less than 1% of UK households live in a housing co-operative.

My own personal view as a co-operator and a Labour Housing Group supporter, is that until the Right to Manage is extended to all registered housing providers and not just local councils, it is going to be hard to see a significant growth of Tenant Management Co-operatives. If we turn to ownership co-ops, it is clear that a Co-operative Tenancy, enshrined in law, is absolutely essential so as to give better protection and clarity for ownership co-ops.

I am particularly keen to see a growth in co-operative community land trusts, where the prices of homes are usually set based on local earnings, and not by the wider housing market. Future resales are also based on future local earnings, so as not to price out future residents. East London Community Land Trust (www.londonclt.org) is based on the site of the former St Clements Hospital near Mile End. Its first 23 homes were completed in the summer of 2016 and prices were £130,000 for a 1 bed, £182,000 for a 2 bed and £235,000 for a 3 bed; all significantly below the prices dictated by the local housing market.

If you are a member of the Co-operative Party I would urge you to take part in the formal consultation; if you have not joined but are supportive of co-ops, now is the time to fill in a membership form and increase the strength of the Co-operative Party in its centenary year! More information can be found on (<https://party.coop/type/2017-policy-consultation>).

Alex Heslop, LHG Executive and

Housing Disrepair and Health

Decent, suitable Housing Disrepair and Health

Decent, suitable housing is a key determinant of the health and wellbeing of a population. Housing is a key part of a nation's infrastructure, impacting upon economic activity, childhood and educational attainment, plus health across the life course. Housing conditions underpin the very fabric of society and so should Labour housing policy.

There is a long history of government endeavours to increase housing supply but there has also been a long record of systematic action to address housing stock condition. This has ranged from early slum clearances to area regeneration, to targeted grants for low income householders and latterly the Decent Homes programme, which brought most of the council and social housing stock up to a decent standard and included investment in energy efficiency and fuel poverty initiatives.

Private sector housing renewal policies moved away from clearance projects of the immediate post-war period towards renovation of existing properties with the state either directly intervening, such as through block renovation, or incentivising householders to make improvements to individual properties through grant aid based on an assessment solely of the property, and later through means tested mandatory grants. Peak grant aid for individual home renovation coincided with a major shift into owner occupation by low income households, stimulated by the Right to Buy initiative and a government vision for a shift to home ownership for the majority.

We are now moving into a period where those low-income homeowners may well be ageing in homes that are no longer decent or provide them with the safe, warm environment which will enable them to live well in later life. And this has consequences for other areas of local authority spending as well as health.

Housing renovation grant assistance was targeted at the worst condition properties, using a revised standard of fitness for human habitation, and aimed at people on low incomes, through introduction of a means test and grants that covered up to 100% of essential renovations.

The Decent Homes standard is measured by indicators that include need for urgent repairs, age of the kitchen and bathroom facilities and thermal comfort, as well as presence of a 'Category 1 hazard'. This is a hazard that presents a significant risk to the health of the occupant. The main reason for homes failing the Decent Homes standard is the presence of a Category 1 hazard. The two commonest Category 1 hazards are falls risk (on stairs / on or between levels / bathing) and excess cold. The changes to the government's approach to addressing private sector disrepair resulted in significant improvements in the housing conditions of those living in poor private housing.

In 2012, around 731,000 households aged 65 years or over (13% of this age group) lived in a home with a Cat1 hazard and 85% (619,000) of these were in owner occupied homes. The cost of poor housing to the NHS alone has been estimated to be at least £1.4billion. This was from research undertaken by the Buildings Research.

Wendy Cocks, LHG Executive, Rochdale CLP

A Statement Labour's Mayoral Candidate for Manchester

I'm delighted to be given this opportunity to contribute an article to Labour Housing Group's Newsletter. Housing has been a key issue for me in my work as Member of Parliament for Leigh, and will continue to be so when I have been elected as Mayor for Manchester.

Manchester City Council is already doing its best in these very challenging times. Housing is at the very heart of a civilised society - it is enshrined in the United Nations Charter - and the truth is that we are not building anywhere enough homes. That must include homes to rent at affordable rents, and homes to buy that people - young people particularly - can afford the deposit for and arrange a mortgage.

This country currently spends £ 33 billion a year on Housing Benefit - and not one brick is laid as a consequence. And it is a well recognised economic fact that for every 200,000 homes built, 1% is added to the Gross Domestic Product - so housebuilding is not just providing the desperately needed homes but is of great benefit to the economy as a whole.

As Mayor of Manchester, I will be pressing for local councils to be encouraged to borrow to build using their stock as collateral - borrowing over 25 years to build homes that will last for 100 years, providing homes for several generations.

Housing is at the top of my agenda.

Any Burnham MP, Labour's Mayoral Candidate for Manchester

House of Lords Report

Providing effective scrutiny and challenge to the Government is one of the main areas of work the House of Lords undertakes. That is particularly important in Housing where after nearly seven years in office the Conservative Party has a record of failure which they own entirely.

The abandoning of the Pay to Stay proposals, the banning of lettings agents fees and protection of tenancies for families who have school age children, are some of the wins achieved during the passage of the Housing & Planning Act 2016 through effective scrutiny of their plans. With my friend and colleague Jeremy Beecham we were able to demonstrate the folly and the poverty of the arguments being put forward. This was helped by Labour Housing Group members and Labour Councillors working with us and providing the evidence to challenge their ill thought out plans.

Ending feudalism in housing and winning elections

Leasehold reform is now back on the political agenda. This is the result of a rare debate in the Commons on 20 December 2016, secured by two back-bench MPs - Conservative Peter Bottomley, and Labour's Jim Fitzpatrick. These two MPs are joint chairs of the all-parliamentary group on leasehold reform.

The Housing Minister felt uncomfortable with the horror stories disclosed in the debate. He agreed to come back to Parliament with proposals to tackle the problems raised by MP's. However the recent housing white paper at paragraphs 4.36 to 4.38 makes only vague promises on further consultation.

Why is this issue important?

Tenure figures for England from the Department of Communities and Local Government revealed that in 2014 there were:

- 14,710,000 owner-occupied dwellings
- 4,747,000 privately rented dwellings.
- 2,387,000 housing association dwellings.
- 1,643,000 local authority dwellings.
- 55,000 other public sector dwellings

It is clear from these figures alone that Labour's Housing policy cannot focus simply on households who rent. It is unfortunate that the housing resolution, supported by 15 constituencies, and passed by the 2016 conference fails to even mention the private rented sector let alone owner-occupiers.

Labour needs to have a more mature debate on housing by developing housing policies that will appeal to all housing tenure groups.

Growth in number of leaseholders

Research by the previous coalition government found that there are now over 4 million leaseholders in England alone, with two thirds of these leaseholders living in London. This figure does not include leaseholders whose freeholder is a public sector housing organisation. The problems that leaseholders face have been well documented by the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership (www.leaseholdknowledge.com) and their sister organisation, the Campaign against Retirement Leasehold Exploitation of Elderly (www.carlex.org.uk).

The Guardian and the Daily Telegraph are united in their opposition to leasehold houses. Volume builders such as Taylor Wimpey make money by selling the freehold to developers. The sale contains clauses which allow for high ground rent increase. In some cases this can make a property unsellable. Home owners often buy these properties with lawyers recommended by the builder. These lawyers are now being sued by other lawyers for negligence. This is a major issue in North West England: for example, parts of Manchester have very large areas of leasehold housing.

While Labour's front bench has condemned these practices, it has responded to events rather than led them. Leasehold abuse is symptomatic of a wider problem which is the leasehold tenure itself. The tenure is non-existent in virtually all of the English speaking world - aside from England and Wales. Over 50% of leaseholders who responded to a recent survey organised by the leasehold advisory service regretted their purchase.